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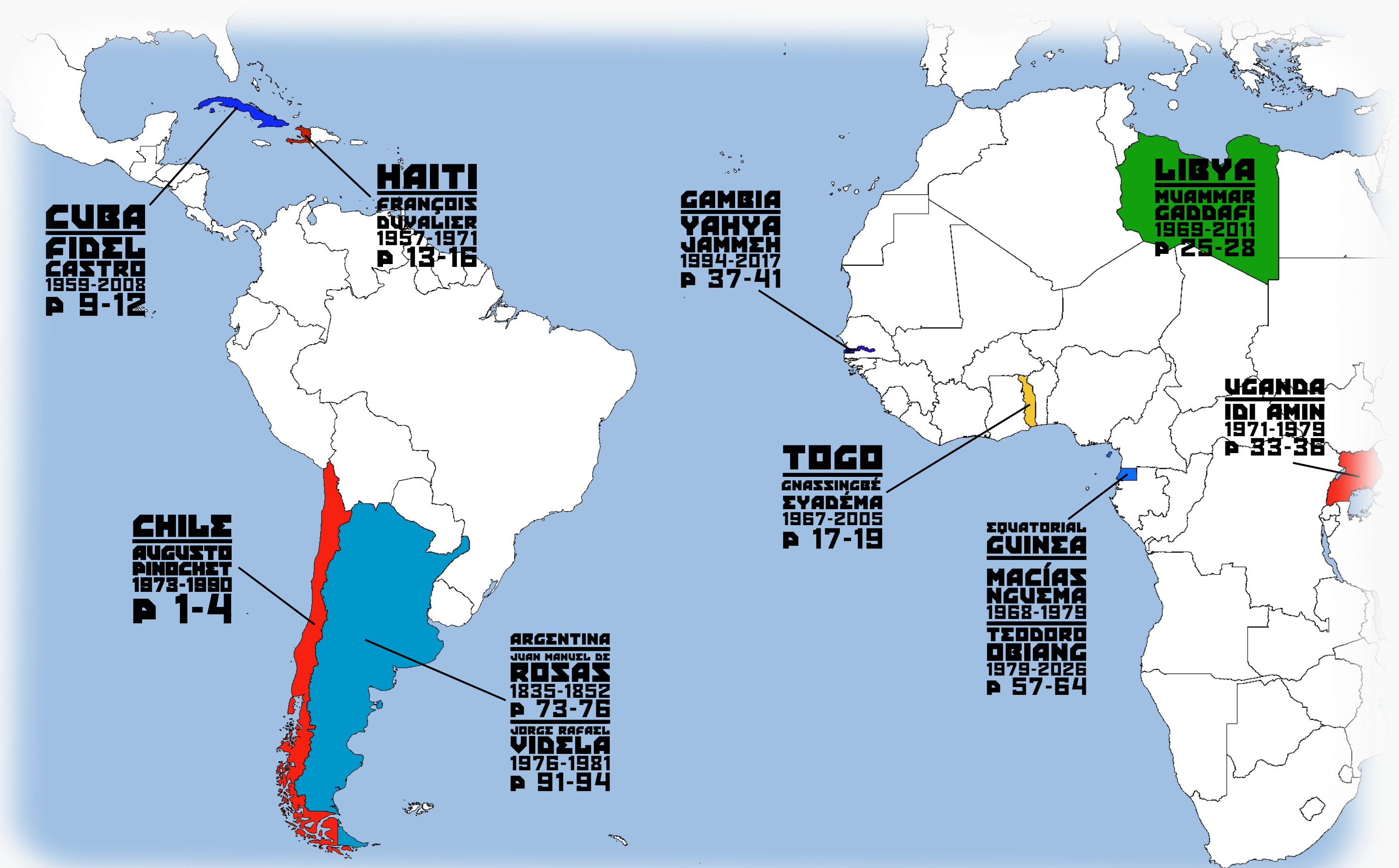
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This book is not a list of facts and figures, nor is it a soul-numbing enumeration of the atrocities committed under these regimes.

It is not a book for children, but neither is it overly graphic in word or image. You may proceed with only the caution inherent to the subject matter.

The stories are mine, and they are probably fiction. Each is a creative distillation of dozens of books, articles, and first-hand accounts, and are intended to provide an accessible way of approaching a few slices of history that often get lost in either crushing despair or academic sterility. I have learned a lot in the process, and I hope you learn some things, as well.

The illustrations were hand-cut and assembled between layers of resin, and many books were harmed in the making of this one. I believe the sacrifice was worth it; hopefully you agree.

Thank you for your support, and may you find more hope than horror in the pages to come.

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

My partner, for his unflagging support; my editor, for approaching each story with kindness, humor, and endless patience; my photographer, for beautifully digitizing the originals and making them print-worthy; and everyone else who endured five years of geopolitical infodumps.

I appreciate you all more than tongue can tell.

— A B C —
DICTATORS

**AN ABECEDARY OF
AUTHORITARIANS,
BULLIES, CAUDILLOS,
— & —
DESPOTS
FROM
EQUATORIAL GUINEA
TO THE
USSR**

IRREN_ECHO

**AUGUSTO
PINOCHET**



EL TATA
— **AND THE** —
CONDOR



As the heavy threat of communism loomed large across the world, American leaders from north and south united to birth the Condor. Rising up on covert wings, prepared to sacrifice all that was necessary in order to rid the world of the crimson scourge; a papier-mâché golem made of dollar bills and blood.

Augusto gazed with pleasure at his creation, watching as it soared on high: communists, dissidents, and other assorted enemies clasped in its mighty claws, bearing them seaward for their final flight. He watched, smiling, as these troublemakers were released, plunging through the torrid air and down, down, to be interred in their liquid graves. There was little malice in his grin, and even less of guilt, for the entire free world stood behind him and condoned his every decision and he knew this, and found his comfort in it. The US, in particular, provided funds with which to fortify and strengthen his creature, though of course precious few were aware of this arrangement at the time.

The Condor alighted on his balcony, bowing low and awaiting judgment for its work. Augusto stroked its feathers gently.



"Hello, my friend, are you well?" he murmured.

"Quite well, thank you, Tata," the Condor grunted happily. "It's good to see you again."

"So it is done, I trust?"

The Condor hissed. "No, Tata, many of them have escaped."

"Escaped?"

The beast gave a snort. "Shall I hunt them down again?"

Augusto smiled, patting its head. "Do that. Do whatever it takes. Rid the earth of my enemies."

The Condor nodded, and each flap of its wings as it rose brought the waves up higher and forced the trees down lower as in the most vicious tropical storm. It would take time, of course, but the president was a patient man and he knew that his friend would see to it that every last rebel was hunted down and eliminated, no matter how far or wide they fled.

And flee they did, tends of thousands of them, and perhaps not all of them were captured in the mighty claws of the Condor, but it was enough, in any case, to make a point to those who managed to escape. That's all that truly mattered anyway, Augusto thought, so long as no one questioned his authority it didn't much matter how many lived or died. He held the reins, and the purse strings of his slender country and he had powers much larger than himself working hard to keep them in his hands.



Augusto was not, however, the Condor's only patriarch, and as time passed it became apparent that even those who gave directives often found themselves the prey. So it often is with such creations, but for Augusto the end came softly and without horror.

With so many masters to please the Condor began to play favorites. It couldn't do the bidding of each and every man, so gradually it turned its back on its Chilean grandfather in favor of those who were more generous with food, more economical with orders. Augusto had what he wanted, so the Condor moved on; but without the beast's presence the riches he had gathered turned to ashes, blown away by mighty, flapping wings.

At the end of his life Augusto was tried for that which he had called into existence and the horrors he had wrought. But as inevitable dusk settled down upon his empire, the Condor glided softly in to collect El Tata before a verdict could be reached.



GURBANGULY

BERDIMUHAMEDOW



**THE DENTIST
WHO WANTED
-TO BE- KING**

Once, far away but not so long ago, there was a palace made entirely of white marble. Everything was made of marble. The floors and fountains were white marble, the walls around them and the ceilings above were also marble. And in the city center there stood a statue of the man who lived in the palace; his name was Berdi.

Berdi was a dentist. How as a dentist so rich? Naturally, because he was also 'The Protector' of all the Turkmen who lived in the city and in the whole country of Turkmenistan around it in this, the Epoch of Power and Happiness.

When the leader before him died, Berdi became the new president. Almost all the people thought he was better and stronger and more talented than the old one, and the ones who didn't quickly changed their minds. He reopened hospitals and schools, and that was great! He lifted heavy weights, raced horses and cars, he was a musician and a DJ. He said the people shouldn't drive black cars, take trips, or use air-conditioners. All of that was also great!



In fact, everything he said and did was wonderful, and no one could say otherwise. When the illness came to the whole world, he told the doctors not to diagnose it or say its name. This meant there was no virus in the whole country, and that was simply wonderful!

Berdi received the IG-Nobel Prize for his handling of the pandemic. He loved getting prizes, especially Guinness World Records. He has one for the city with the most white marble buildings. The people think that's great, even though they're hungry and hot.

Do you know anything else about Berdi? No, me neither. The people cannot say anything, they cannot leave and we cannot enter. Is he still The Protector, or has his son taken over completely? Does he still race cars, breed horses, and lift heavy things? Is he still alive? Probably, but we don't even know that for sure.

Berdi, wise and humble dentist that his is, takes great pains to protect the privacy of himself and his people. They say little, they want less, and they could not leave his side, even if they wanted to. Isn't that the very best?



**FIDEL
CASTRO**

— IS —

THE MAN

FOR

THE HOUR

He's been speaking for some time already, in that particular way of his, expertly walking the line between passion and enthusiasm that few seem to realize even exists. As always, he's pacing; solidly, and with intent, fidgeting all the while with his ever-present cigar. Sometimes he smokes it, too, but mostly it give his fingers something to do while his mind runs its marathon. He's aware of his audience, gathered around him at rapt attention even hours later, and he loves them; at once he is both doomsday preacher and science teacher, desperate to save your soul and show you the wonders of the world but only if you'll let him, only if you decide you really want him to. He looks at you briefly, smiles, then his eyes dart away again because they only see in bursts when he gets like this, they're not really needed right now. The air sizzles around you and it's not jus the tropical heat, the fire is coming directly from him.

"Fidel, please, you must realize you have a target on your back! You cannot keep--"

Fidel cut him off, cigar-hand raised and a twinkle in his eye. "What is this revolution without the people? This isn't about me, it's about them, and I will -I must- speak with them, listen to them, meet them personally in their homes and fields and streets, and really listen to what they need from me. Nothing is more important, nothing more essential than the lives of the Cuban people, their wants and dreams. If I do not interact with them personally, I cannot serve them well, and then I am no better than those who came before me and against whom we have fought so tirelessly. You know this, don't you, brother?" He shrugged, and the speaker sighed.

"Yes, Fidel, I know. I'm concerned for you, is all." The room murmured agreement. "You ask what this revolution is without the people. Well, I ask: what is this revolution without you?"





"If I am killed it does not matter," Fidel said simply. "Raul will lead you, Che will lead you, you will lead yourselves and you will take care of the people and the people will take care of you. This isn't just a new government, it's a new society; a new way of interacting with and learning from one another! It is a Truth that has always existed and can finally speak itself," he paused briefly, shoulders squared toward his audience, daring them to disagree, knowing that they wouldn't.

"Remember our time in prison," he continued, "and the extraordinary lengths to which these indomitable women-" he kissed his hands and gestured to them, bowing his head in genuine reverence, "took my thoughts, scribbled on toilet paper, hidden in cigar tubes, so carefully smuggled out, and published them, spread them around -and at such great risk to themselves! While we waited and trained in our makeshift stockade schoolhouse, they were out on the streets speaking to the people, teaching them, preparing the way to victory. They are as indispensable as I am -more so- as are all those who were with us in Mexico."

The room heaved a sigh, recalling the brave peasants who risked themselves to aid the ragged guerrilla soldiers on their quest; without them all would surely have been lost.

"Everyone in this revolution is critical," Fidel thundered, "everyone is needed, every life is worth the struggle. So they kill me, so what? They've tried a dozen times before, they'll try a dozen more, and sooner or later they will succeed; but they will not kill what we have created. They will not kill our revolution!"

Pulling deeply from his cigar, he tapped the ash and once more took up pacing.

"We will carry out our program little by little. All these outside aggressions, these attempts at silencing us, they will only serve to accelerate the revolutionary process. In Cuba we will construct socialism in the most orderly possible manner, within a reasonable period of time, with the least amount of trauma and problems. Those outside see only what they wish to: they see trials, executions, prison sentences," Fidel jabbed at the air with his cigar, bulleting his points, utterly lost now in his own fervor.

"They do not see that those we try are those who persecuted us. They are criminals, they brutalized our people and we will punish them for it! These are not mass or random killings, they are justice meted out! The people are upset, and rightly so, and if we do not implement the law then they will take it upon themselves. The imperialists can condemn me, but I would rather take this burden on myself than have the fear and hatred spread through our country like a virus. I want to show the people that we can be trusted to protect them, to avenge them when necessary, but then shelter them from further harm. For this, and all the rest, history will absolve me!"





You look around the room, feeling a bit dazed, as others opine and suppose, giving Fidel a moment to breathe and granting a dynamism to what had become more of a lecture than a conversation between friends. They spoke of elections, and the importance of widespread literacy before such a step. The program was coming along nicely, they said, and Fidel was thrilled that so many who had never held a book would soon be able to indulge in his personal favorite pastime. Soon knowledge in general would be within reach for the common people -politics, history, literature, science- he was giddy at the very thought, joyfully impatient, a child who must wait just a bit longer before opening his presents. The happiness bubbled and propelled him into other trains of thought, splitting and converging in a semi-controlled chaos, which he then spoke aloud while everyone followed as best they could. Somehow it was always coherent, energizing, even if the delivery left you winded.

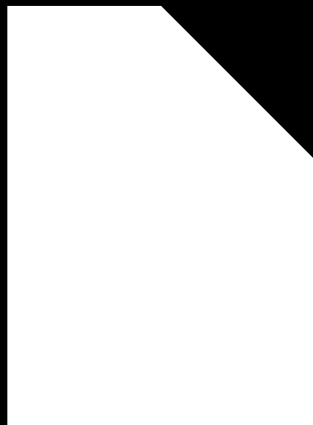
Outside the window you mistake dawn for dusk; you've been here all night, but it felt like moments.

Could this man deliver all he promised? Could he realize all he dreamed? If anyone could, it is Fidel; of this you are certain. He says the revolution is not over, because revolution is a process. He says we must work diligently, all of us, together and for one another. We will stand strong against those who seek our downfall, we will work hard, we will have patience, we will succeed. We must. We are, all of us, united. We are one under Fidel, and we will prosper.

You realize suddenly how tired you are, having sat for hours at rapturous attention. But he's still going, and you don't want to miss a word. There's coffee sliding in on a tray, taken gratefully by all, and you settle back in for the duration.

**FRANÇOIS
DUVALIER**

**THE ———
GREAT
——— AND**



**POWERFUL
PAPA DDC**

Our next story begins on a very small island in the middle of a great big sea. The people of this island were very poor, and could not read or write, but they worshiped the old gods, and practiced the old magic, and usually that was enough. When the old gods were busy and the old magic didn't work, they called on their doctor, who traveled around and took care of them. The people loved their doctor, and they called him Papa Doc.

Now, this island wasn't controlled by the many poor workers, but by a few rich businessmen. The people didn't like that, and neither did Papa Doc, so one day he said, "I will run for president, and give the country back to the people." Thus he ran, and won, and the people were overjoyed; except the ones who weren't, but they were quickly disappeared.

The man who ran against Papa Doc planned a coup a few years later, but it failed and the traitor had his head cut off. This happened while Papa Doc was sick in bed, but he ordered that the head be put on ice and brought in to him.



"I won," he told the Head.

The Head laughed. "Yes, but the friend that you trust to rule while you are sick wants to steal your power."

"How do you know that?" asked Papa Doc.

The Head only smiled, and would say no more.

He didn't want to believe the Head, but now he was afraid and angry at his friend. Papa Doc demanded that he be killed, but the man -his former friend- managed to escape before the plan was carried out.

"He turned himself into a big, black dog," said the Head, "to hide himself from you."

"That won't do at all!" cried Papa Doc, and demanded that all the black dogs in the city be killed.

"That's one threat addressed," replied the Head, "but what about the communists? And the leaders of other countries? Don't they also desire your downfall?"

"That's true," he said, "but what should I do?"

The Head smiled, and again was silent.



For many days Papa Doc thought of nothing but the words the Head had spoken. He watched as John in America ridiculed him publicly, and decided to put a curse on him; shortly thereafter, President Kennedy was shot. As for the communists, Papa Doc's secret police did their jobs very well. They gave many people acid baths, and many more were publicly hanged. Papa Doc was very pleased and told the Head all about it.

"I'm sure the people are afraid now," said the Head, "but it's time for another election. Why would they vote for the man who killed their loved ones?"

Papa Doc frowned. "I can't hold a normal election," he said, "I might not win. But the people cannot read or write, nor should they have to think for themselves, when there's so much else to tend to. Perhaps I could pre-mark all the ballots 'yes,' so the people don't have to worry about it." So pleased was he with this idea that he didn't wait for the Head to respond, but set about marking the ballots.

After the election, he once more sought out the Head. "I won," he said, "and now I have all the power and no one can challenge me."

"Surely now you are a god," answered the Head, "but do the people worship you as one?"

"They don't," said Papa Doc, "but they will."

He quickly donned the clothes of a Voodoo priest, and changed his voice to be like that of the Voodoo spirits, so the people would know that he was powerful and could do magic. They knew, and were afraid, but now it was much too late. Their beloved Papa Doc had all the power, and all the money, and all the magic, and he held it tightly as he aged and withered and died.



**GNASSINGBÉ
SYADÉMA**

STOP OVER
IN A
QUIET LAND

"Welcome to Togo," a deep, booming voice greets you as you step off the plane.

"Thank you very much," you say, while shaking the president's hand. He doesn't introduce himself, but you know that this is president Eyadéma. There are soldiers everywhere, and they are all watching you closely. They have been waiting for you on the hot tarmac for hours, because the president demanded that the plane land in Togo, even though that's not where you're going. Eyadéma does this a lot; he loves to entertain.

"Please, come with me," he says. You follow him to a limousine, and you are driven through the countryside as he tells you about the bountiful harvests, the earnest farm hands; while out in the fields thin, exhausted people work, and they do not look up as you pass by.

Now you are in the city, and the buildings are old and crumbling. Weeds grow up through the cracks, and the people sit in the doorways and stare.

"It's the lunch break," explains Eyadéma, "the people work very hard and deserve a rest."

You think that the people look strong enough to work, but you don't say this.

"We're renovating this part of the city," he says, "so that it's as beautiful as the rest of it."

There are no work vehicles, crews, or tools, but you don't say this either. The landscape doesn't change from one block to the next; just quiet, shabby houses lining endless, empty streets. Nothing but unchecked entropy.



The wall surrounding his palace is new and strong, and now you are inside it where everything sparkles. He welcomes you in with a bow, where you are met with a decadent feast served by people like those outside. They do not look at you as they set down the plates. They say nothing as Eyadéma complains.

"I'm sorry this food is so horrible," he whines, glaring at the caviar, "w weren't expecting guests and my people weren't ready." He sighs at the champagne as it's poured. The servants stand in the corners, not watching, just waiting. As the hours pass, Eyadéma tells you about the plane crash. "I was the only survivor," he says, and you don't say that you know that isn't true.

Dessert dances out with the women, hundreds of them, thousands, dancing to the music with everything but their eyes. He shows you a comic book about himself, proudly translating the story of his superhuman powers and death-defying stunts. "Many have tried to kill me," he says, "but they cannot."

"I must be getting back to the plane," you say finally, desperately, "I really must be on my way."

He does not like this but he nods, saying nothing. He escorts you back to the plane, which is ready to fly. He hands you a gift; a wristwatch with his face in the center, which slowly fades away and the returns. You thank him.

"I will see you again, my friend," he says with a smile as you board the plane.

You hope that isn't true, but once again you say nothing.



**FRANCISCO
FRANCO**

**A PACT OF
FORGETTING**

I listen closely, drumbeats.

Fascism, communism, democracy, anarchy: each a specter looming just beyond the Spanish borders, awaiting anxiously the impending crumble of the monarchy, each certain of its own righteousness, ready to fill the void. They send their puppets, dressed in soldiers' garb, to dance among the rifle fire and pull desperately at the rope, a frantic tug of war.

I watched.

Back and forth the power swung, as each side tired, formed alliances, reemerged and gained advantage. Volunteers from the world over threw in their support, heedless of the wishes of the people.

I waited.

Alliances morphed into liabilities, severed and rebuilt, *they've always been the enemy, have you forgotten?* Bodies piled high along the village roads, smoldering, set alight again to compress them down, make room for more.

I smiled.



Behind me rallied my troops, peering eagerly over my shoulder, long since rested from Morocco and ready once more to fight. I call them to arms, my voice high and shrill, not to be misheard or mistaken; I call the escaped criminals, the Latin American exiles, Great War German soldiers who couldn't or wouldn't adjust to peacetime. A black American boxer fleeing from racial prejudice, a reformed circus clown. They smeared their faces in walnut juice to look more like Moroccans, to cause confusion, and in they swept to strike down the hodgepodge band of weary rebels.

My time well bided, I brought the civil war to a swift and decisive halt. To the sounds of cheers I rode a pure white horse through the streets of Madrid, understanding better than the people themselves how ready they were to live without war. There were protests, of course, and dissidents, but they quieted quickly and died easily and a heavy silence settled over the whole of the Spanish Empire.

And thus I assumed my place as Generalissimo.



War broke out once more beyond the borders, but it was none of my concern. I shrugged, wryly grinning, blessing and flattering and promising, all with fingers firmly crossed. I took no sides, I fought no wars; it was time to simply wait and watch for a victor to emerge to whom I might pledge allegiance, extracting food and favors along the way. Holed up in my estate I could safely let the storm pass by.

And pass it did, as these things do, and no one questioned me. Decades of war had exhausted my people and left behind a meek and fearful land to rule, though disappointingly they were also too tired to build many monuments to me.

So I had one built myself.

The Valley of the Fallen - *very expensive* and carved into the side of a mountain- was topped with a cross one could see clearly from miles around. I said, naturally, that it was a memorial for the dead of both sides of the civil war and *not* my personal mausoleum, but I'm doubtful the people believed me; least of all the political prisoners whose labor proved so vital to its construction.

I must say, I found it rather insulting that when the time came to enter my grand and final resting place, not a single world leader came to see me off. I waited and watched for days, weeks; in fact, I'm still waiting for more than just the most radical to make the pilgrimage, but it seems the Valley has become a place of scorn and shame for Spain and all her people.

Pity, because it really is a lovely place.



**MUAMMAR
GADDAFI**

**AND —
— THE**

**GREAT GREEN
GHIBLI**

From beyond the city walls rose the hot, dry winds of change that the desert dwellers have always known simply as the *ghibli*. Wending its way down streets and around buildings it found Muammar, who stood atop the stool his friend had carried into the square for just this purpose. He called out and gestured grandly to passersby, while several boys from his grade clustered around him; knowing even then that his words were worth hearing, that they'd mean something some day. The ghibli surrounded them, depositing its burden, and settled in to wait.

Muammar insisted his teenage friends take classes that would prepare them for military careers, and the coup he was already planning. At his behest they formed cells, recruiting other boys, and kept information sharing to a minimum so that no one could betray the whole group. Only Muammar knew everyone involved, and the enthusiastic boys happily trusted the dark-eyed Bedouin with their lives; even after he was deemed a threat to the king and expelled from school for 'treasonable behavior.' They knew this was just the ghibli once more, preparing the way for revolution.

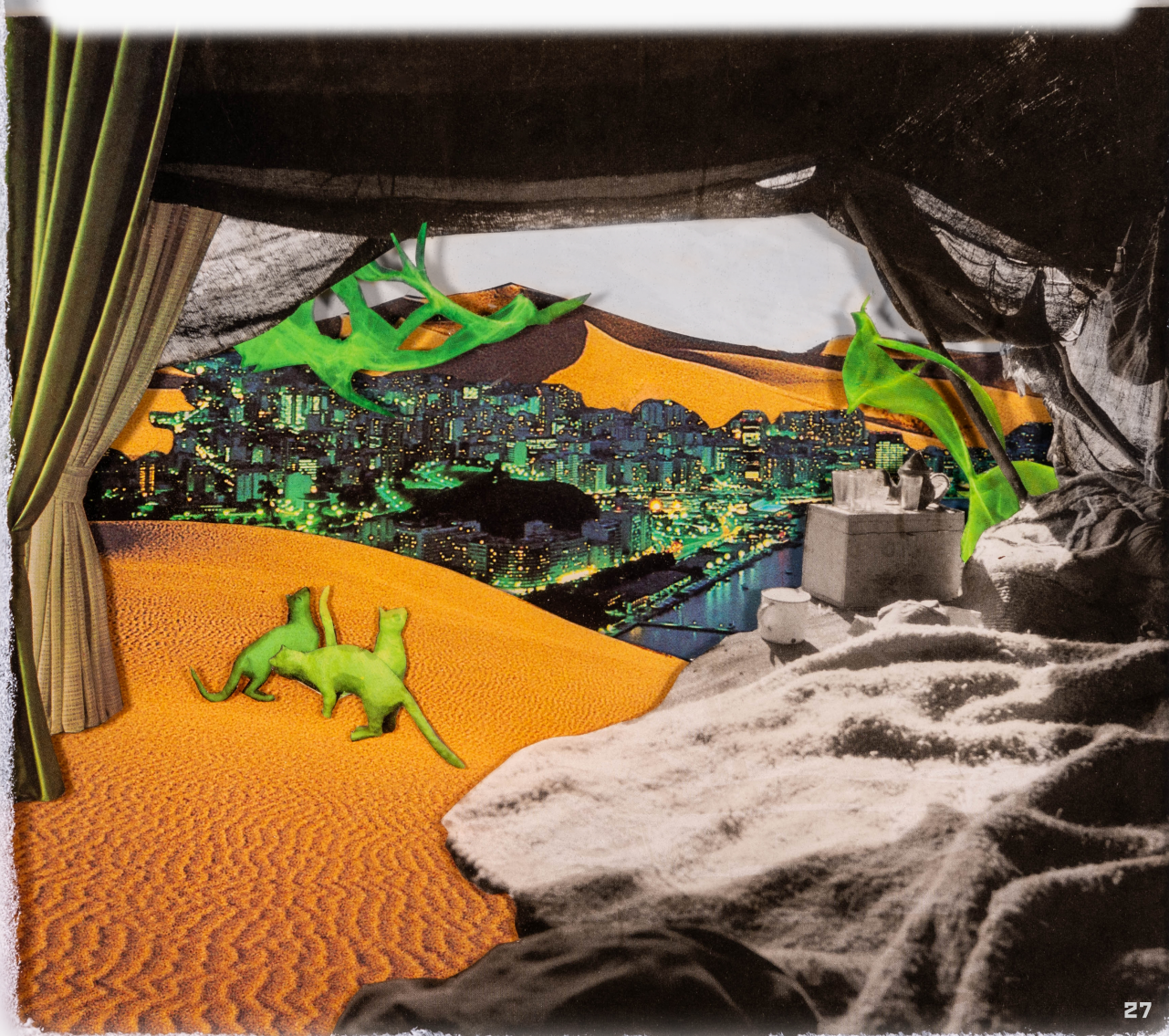
For 12 long years he waited, trusting that as sand and stone are subject to the ghibli's will so, too, are men's hearts. Soon they would know what he had always known: that they deserved the hope he held for them, that the better lives of which they dreamed were waiting for them, just beyond the city walls.

Once more, from out of the desert came the wind, to bathe the nation in Islamic green.



The once tri-color flag became solid green, flying above Green Square as Muammar spoke and led his new society. These revolutionary thoughts of his found their way onto the printed page, and his Green Book became the text by which his people learned to read as part of their curriculum in the Green Book Studies Center. From the Book evolved the Great Green Charter of Human Rights, a treatise on peace and freedom as it applied to all Libyans from the desert to the Green Mountain; except, of course, those behind the great green steel prison gates, those dissidents rounded up during the Green Terror. Green arches marked the thresholds of cities and towns, green shutters and frames the doors and windows of buildings. Green license plates adorned the vehicles as they paraded up and down the coast in the Green March, a show of support for the new Brother Leader.

Under his new green flag Muammar traveled far and wide, pitching his goatskin tent on the carefully manicured lawns of foreign leaders. His bodyguards, beautiful and deadly, traveled with him, their military uniforms contrasting sharply with Muammar's traditional Bedouin robes; all this, however, added to his mystique and endeared him to many, especially those interested in the black gold bubbling up from beneath sandscape. Indeed, for Muammar the oil was everything; without it there could be no Jamahiriya, his idealistic, socialist 'state of the masses.'



Once the great, green ghibli was powered by crude very little could stop it, and as wealth poured in the cities began to sparkle; but the more they sparkled the more Muammar's attention wandered. He felt the winds shifting again, knew that he must export more than just oil: it was time to share his ideas, to unite the Arab world under his billowing banner of green. He funded rebel groups all over the world, trained them, gave them refuge from oppressive regimes. He picked fights with world leaders, criticized them, loudly proclaimed the superiority of his state as those glistening cities began to fade and crumble under the incessant desert wind. The green paint chipped, the flags began to tatter. Those whose job it had been to sweep the pale green concrete in the Square now had better things to do, and those who didn't found themselves starving. The ghibli grew, fed now by the wails of those the Jamahiriya had forsaken.

Muammar didn't notice; there were other storms to deal with.

When he was found sheltering in a drain pipe from the ghibli that had risen up against him, a gust of desert people sick to death of dying, that wind found him genuinely surprised. Wasn't the wind a friend? Hadn't it always been? Hadn't he used it wisely, to build up his people and right the wrongs of outsiders? Hadn't he been a good Brother, the best Brother Leader he could be?

To this day, beyond the city walls in an unmarked grave lies poor, forsaken Muammar; beneath a pile of stones meant to keep out desert scavengers, while above him blows the ghibli, hot, mercurial, and wild.



**ENVER
HOXHA**

— **A**

**CONCRETE
TOADSTOOL
COMPLEX**

From the street passersby regarded Nexhmije's library, her stately silhouette darkening the window as she wept for her love. She never left the house anymore, not for decades now. It wasn't safe outside, away from the watchful eyes of the loyal but threadbare Sigurimi, the valiant secret police who protected her from those who did not understand.

Nexhmije ran one hand along the 13 spines of her husband's memoirs and sighed. So many years without him, now, and she missed him more than ever. She knew each volume inside out, had read and edited every word, but still when the sadness settled heavy on her heart she'd pull them out, one by one, and read her favorite passages. They spoke of struggle, of progress, of the radical transformation that only Enver could have brought them; of his dreams for the future of his people and the communist prosperity that would last for centuries to come.

"And so it should have been," she thought, "but they betrayed us." Skipping ahead she read descriptions of the brave young men with whom they'd both fought, their friends and relatives, their neighbors living alongside them in the Bllok. "Thank goodness they were, too," she shook her head and turned the page, "were it not for all the security in our little Bllok, all the careful eyes protecting us, we may not have known of their deception until it was too late." Each and every one of these former comrades of whom her husband spoke so fondly had shown his true colors at the end, and they had paid the price. Their families, too, were liquidated or sent to re-education camps because, as Enver often said, one could never be too careful with such things; especially in Albania.



Albanians hold grudges, he would remind her when she complained of having no friends, *we cannot give them the chance to act on those grudges*.

"Oh, Comrade Enver," she sighed, "such good you did for your country, and for me! You always took such good care of us, you always knew what was best."

She opened to the section about his national security strategy, after they'd been abandoned by the rest of the world. There was no one out there to save them in the event of an invasion, so Comrade Enver commissioned thousands and thousands of bunkers built in every corner, on every boulevard, along every beach and field. 'Uncle Hoxha's concrete toadstools,' the people called them, and they did look a bit like that. Nexhmije smiled. "Even when we struggled the most, even when the enemy sat outside the door, dear Comrade Enver never gave up and did everything he could to protect us." There were bunkers enough for everyone, many connected by tunnels so that the people could move about and defend their land even as destruction rained down from above. "It's good we never needed them," she thought, "but they were there in case we did."



Her husband's warm smile floated back across her mind and she wiped away a tear. "So much has changed since you left," she murmured, "no one could lead like you. They've abandoned us again, our plans, our beliefs, the ones they once claimed for themselves. The people traipse back and forth across the borders now, they leave their homes, they worship false gods, and what has it brought them? Nothing you, yourself, didn't try to give them first. They don't understand that these things take time, even Stalin knew that, and we were just on the edge of utopia."

From Nexhmije's curtained window can be seen some of the bunkers squatting in the shadows, waiting for a war that never came; at least not here. You can't see the ones near the border, the observers of the war in Kosovo. The ones that crumbled beneath Serbian bombs, the ones that were tried and found wanting, the traitors. You can't see those from here, just like you can't see -or even find- the graves of the men and their families who betrayed the Hoxhas. Uncle Hoxha made sure of that. He always knew what was best.



HIS EXCELLENCY
PRESIDENT FOR LIFE
FIELD MARSHAL
AL HADJI DOCTOR

**IDI
AMIN
DADA**

VC, DSO, MC, CBE
LORD OF ALL
THE BEASTS
OF THE EARTH
AND FISHES
OF THE SEAS
AND CONQUEROR
OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

**IN AFRICA
IN GENERAL
AND UGANDA
IN PARTICULAR
— AND —
THE QUEEN**

"Certainly, Sir," drawled Major Iain Grahame to the superior officers seated before him, "Lt. Amin will do nicely as head of state. He's loyal, and strong; a tremendous athlete. Built like a brick shithouse, that one, and virtually bone from the neck up."

The seated Brits laughed. "Use small words, then?" asked the Colonel.

Grahame nodded. "Small words, Sir. He'll do whatever you ask, just explain it nice and slow. Oh, and you'll need a translator; he hardly speaks a word of English."

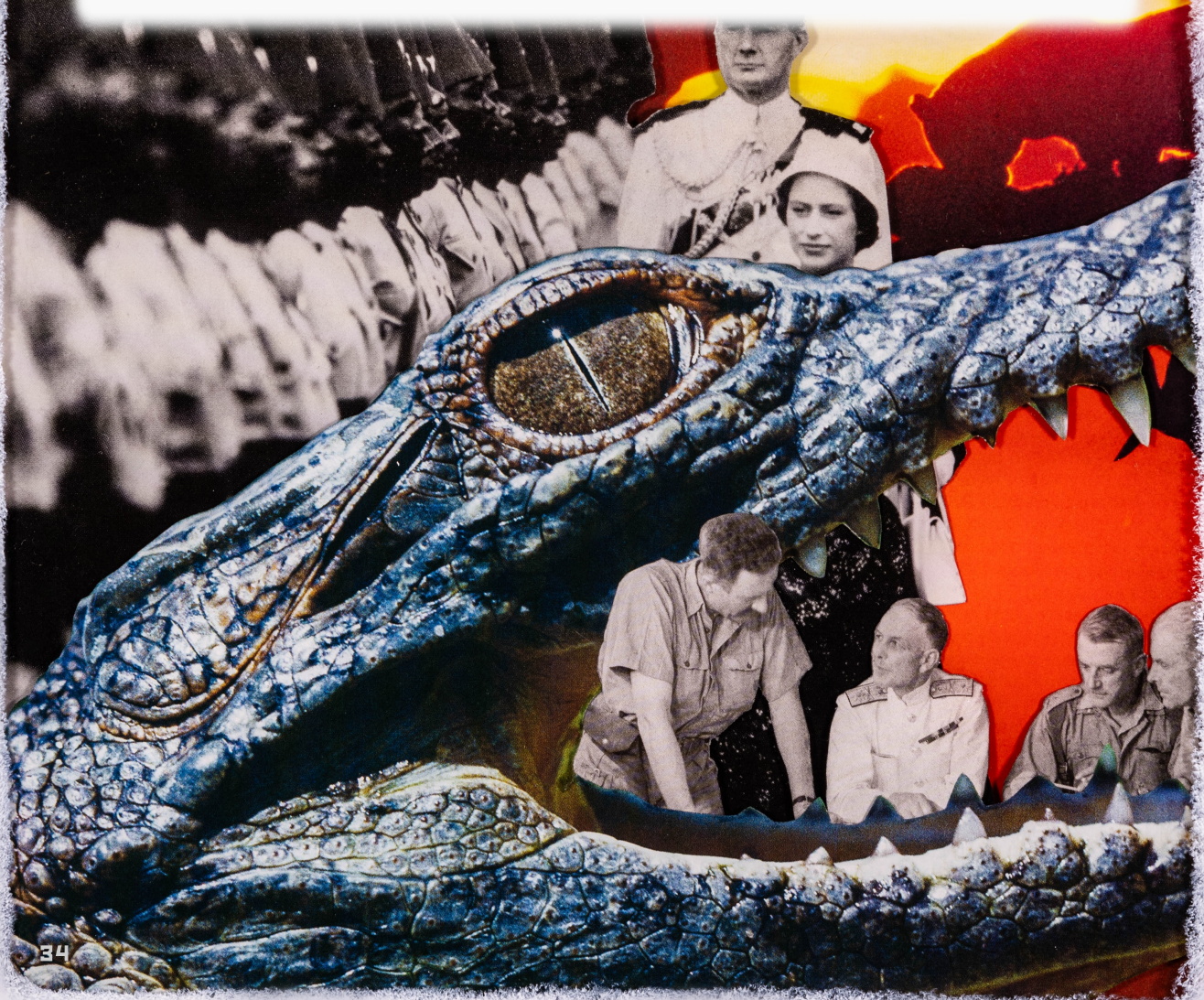
One of the men cleared his throat. "He's got a bit of a reputation though, isn't that right? For having, well, a *flair for the dramatic*, shall we say."

A low chuckle spread throughout the room. "I supposed you could say that, Sir," agreed Grahame, "he does get rather carried away on occasion." A few of his audience gave inquisitive looks, so he continued, "Remember the cattle rustlers? We'd asked him to arrest them, and, well...." he shrugged. "He got a bit *overzealous*."

"He killed them," muttered the throat-clearer, "he shot them and left their bodies on the savannah for the hyenas."

The silence heaved and settled, broken at length by a nervous laugh from Grahame. "As I said, he's *enthusiastic*." The others nodded uncomfortable, shrugging and wanly smiling around the room.

"Well, I'm sure we needn't worry too much," said the Colonel as he rose. "A little gentle guidance, perhaps, if he makes it to the presidency, and I'm sure he'll learn to toe the line."



Somewhat later, and somewhat less dapper now that the sweat plastered their suits to their straining bodies, the four British businessmen avoided each other's eyes as they tried to work out just how they'd ended up here, beneath the pole of a sedan chair, carting a cackling, 300 lb African through the dusty city. Idi, for his part, delighted in the spectacle. He howled in his native Kakwa, "Hurry up, gentlemen, I think the crocodiles are getting hungry!" as the cameras clicked and flashed through the constant drone of bagpipes. He slurped and lunged, giving directions and leading the absurd parade the long way around through town. "We're taking the scenic route," he bawled, "look up from your feet, there's so much to admire! You're hurting my feelings, ignoring the sights I'm showing you!"

Guffawing at his own jokes, Idi asked a nearby aid if the intake ducts at the hydroelectric dam had been cleared of the bodies the crocodiles were too full to eat. The aid assured him that they had, and Idi replied with a regal nod as the sedan jerked and swayed uncertainly.

Eventually tiring of the game, Idi directed his bearers to the tent in which they were to dine. The businessmen mopped their brows in relief as they sat, taking great pains not to look horrified at the exotic spread before them. Idi rubbed his hands together greedily and tucked in, ignoring the meekly questioning sounds of his guests.

"They want to know what it is they're eating," said the translator, "what shall I tell them?"

"Tell them the truth!" Idi crowed, mouth full, "they won't believe you anyway!"

The businessmen grinned uneasily, trying to share in a joke they couldn't understand. "The former chief of police," said the translator with a shrug, "I can't recall his name." The men laughed loudly, relieved to have been included, and began to eat. It really is quite good, they said to one another with surprise, must be some sort of wild game.

As the businessmen prepared to leave, unsure of how successful their trip had been, given how little of business they'd spoken, Idi pressed a letter into the hand of the oldest among them. "For Her Majesty," he said with a mischievous smile.



Your Royal Highness, Her Majesty the Queen,

How have you been, my dear? Has it been years since we dined together, or merely months? Why haven't you responded to my telegrams? My heart longs for you- may I call you Lizzie? I'm certain you won't mind; I saw the way you looked at me.

It seems you've been busy, darling, dangling false promises before me and my people- tsK tsK. You've forgotten something, though, left it behind, so I've sent it on ahead: all those Asians! You brought them here, gave them land and wealth and conceited notions, but I tell you we don't want them. I hope there's room enough on that island of yours to take them in, or perhaps you'll shuffle them off on to another hapless nation over which you claim control.

You thought you could control me, too, didn't you Lizzie? Well, it is a man's place to rule, and here I AM that man. I made those fools you sent carry me around the city, and how nicely they bow! You've taught them well. But oh, Lizzie, I don't blame you, really. You're just a lovesick woman waiting for these big, black hands to have their way with you! Don't deny it.... Come visit me sometime, I'll make all your dreams come true. My wives won't mind- perhaps they'll join us!

Yours always,

*His Excellency, President for Life, Field Marshal Al Hadji Doctor Idi Amin Dada, VC, DSO, MC, CBE,
Lord of All the Beasts of the Earth and Fishes of the Seas
and Conqueror of the British Empire in Africa in General and Uganda in Particular*

PS- See how much improved my English has become? Not bad for a brainless African, eh Lizzie?

PPS- Soon we'll launch our 'Save Britain Fundraiser,' as I've heard you're having some trouble of late.



**WEST
AFRICAN
WITCH
HUNT**

**YAHYA
JAMMEH**

We sit in the car keeping watch, passing the bottle rhythmically back and forth between us, waiting. The streets grow darker and empty out, the last few stragglers casting furtive glances in our direction wondering whether we are a different sleek black cab from the one they saw the next block over, or the same one. Are we following them? They scurry past, we drink and wait and sit, just like every Thursday.

I smile at my companion, check and clean his gun for him while he sucks at the bottle. He always takes more than his share, but he's pretty thick; and the hooch is courtesy of our Boss, so I don't mind. He peers at my hands while I work -wanting to learn even though we both know he can't- as I introduce the borrowed pistol to its ammunition, sourced from local hunters and not really intended for this gun or purpose. It works though, well enough; anyway, tonight we're hunting witches, and everyone knows guns are no use on them. Tonight they're mostly for show.

My partner sees I've emptied the bottle and with a grin groped behind his seat for another. I shout and grab it from him before he can sip, sooth his frightened face with a different bottle, while explaining that *this one* is for the witches. He nods as if he understands. We sit and sip and wait.



When the time comes we slip out of our taxi and into the building, along with several other units much like ours. There are more of us than there are of them this time, but that's ok, we don't mind sharing. They mind, of course, but they're witches; they know what's in these bottles, the spiritual liquids that separate body and soul, and so most of them submit their flesh instead. Of course we make them drink anyway, and haul them down the road to the Boss's home village where we dump them in the well. The Boss really likes this well, for some reason, and insists we use it whenever possible. Then back to base where we empty what little alcohol is left onto the Boss's Jalangs. He loves those little idols, insists they keep him strong and in power. He's surely attended to them already tonight, and my partner sighs as I pour; he thinks it's a waste, dumping booze on clumps of stone. But if they're keeping the Boss strong then they're keeping us strong, too, and they deserve our thanks. I pat my partner on the shoulder and we head for home, drunk and spent and satisfied.



My Mama doesn't like what I do, even though it's a good job. She gives me *that look* every Friday morning when she comes back from the shops, her ears all a-buzz with last night's gossip.

"What did you do," she hisses, "as though I don't already know," even though she can tell I'm hungover and can't be bothered. Who asked her, anyway? She's not the one putting food on the table, ever since the Virus took Pop. I *told him* to listen to the Boss. I *told them both* that the Boss -President Yahya himself- had advised us to throw out all that evil Western medicine in favor of the natural herbs he recommended. I told them both so many times, and they should've listened.... But they didn't, and then Pop was dead and it was too late. Serves 'em right. At least my little sis is listening, Allah be praised. "The Virus is her penance for the sin of homosexuality," is what the Boss would say if he knew; but then, if he knew, not even Allah could keep her head and body joined. So we all keep mum and she takes her herbs like a good girl and one day she'll be cured, just like Yahya promised.

For 22 years we did that Friday morning dance, my Mama and me. Every week she came with less food and more gossip, but always with *that look*; until that look of hers ran out for good and she sat down with me at the table and asked if I'd heard.



Yeah, yeah, the Boss lost the election. Of course I knew, it's all anyone had talked about for months. And he hasn't left yet because He's the President for Life, they can't *make* him leave. The election was a sham in any case; everyone knows that.

Mama put her hand on mine until I looked up into her gleaming eyes, and then she said he left. Fled. Hightailed it out in the dead of night on a private plane stuffed with cash and drugs and all the silverware from the palace table. Anything he could grab, throw in a sack, looked valuable. I don't believe her, obviously, it's just idle women's chatter and isn't worth the dregs of a bottle you can never quite get out. She thinks I should run too, stay with my auntie in the countryside and pry withered vegetables from the ground, because if Jammeh's gone then we're on our own and the taxis are a dead giveaway. "They'll have questions," she says.

Well I have answers! I'm not going anywhere, and Yahya will be back. How could it be any other way? He said he'd rule for a thousand years, God willing, and why wouldn't God will it? Now leave me in peace, I haven't slept a wink and my head is killing me.



**KIM
JONG
-IL**

**JUCHE
PEOPLE,
DEAR
READER**

In a little log cabin deep in the mountain forest, near the encampment of the revolutionary soldiers, lived a righteous guerrilla fighter and his brave bodyguard. One night, while a thunderstorm raged outside, the bodyguard gave birth to a baby boy. The moment the boy was born the storm quieted, and the clouds parted, a vivid double rainbow shone bright overhead, and a brand new star appeared in the heavens to celebrate the new arrival. This boy, whose birth had been foretold by a sparrow, would one day rule the entire world; and when the soldiers heard his first cry they danced and sang, carving and painting messages of hope into the nearby trees. The Dear Leader was born, and his father named him Yuri Irsenovich Kim. Later on, he named himself Kim Jong-Il.

When Kim was only 3 weeks old, he began his daily walks around the soldiers' camps, and 5 weeks later he started to greet them as he walked, offering helpful suggestions and encouragement. At just 3 years old he smeared black ink on a classroom map of Japan, causing devastating typhoons to hit the real Japan, killing thousands. And after the heroic defeat of both the Japanese and American imperialists who had tried to subjugate the country, Kim's father -now no longer a humble guerrilla fighter, but the Supreme Leader of Korea- chose little Kim, now just 10 years old, to succeed him as leader of their people.



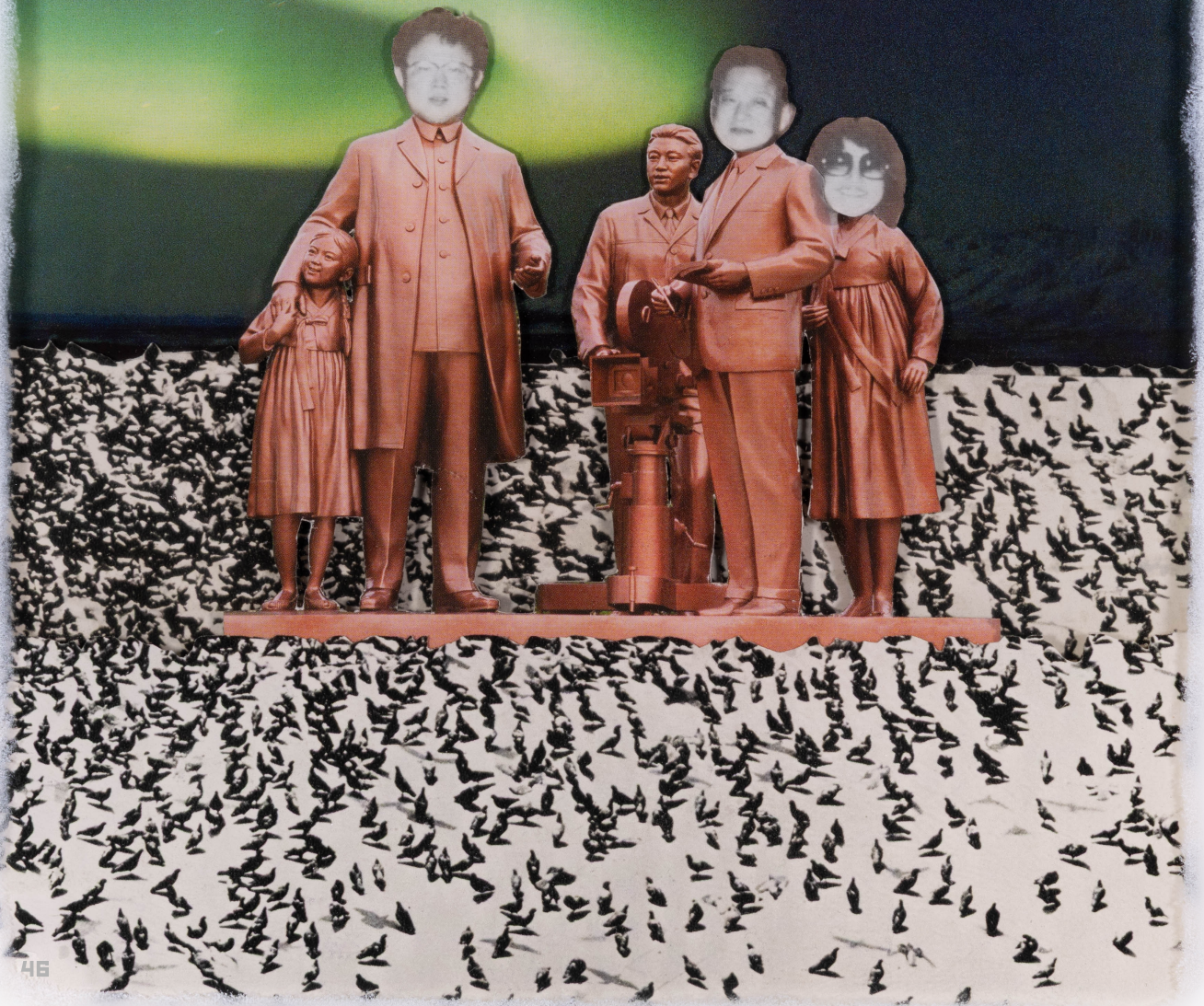
In his 30s, as he prepared for his new role, Kim ordered a small log cabin built in the forests of the sacred Mount Paekdu. He had his men carve and paint the famous messages of hope into the nearby trees, and the people of Korea visited this place and marveled at the clarity of the words, the sturdiness of the house in which their Dear Leader had been born all those many years ago. It was at this time, too, that the people learned the full extent of their Supreme Leader's heroic deeds. They had always known he was wonderful, and freed them from foreign oppression, but now they knew when, and how, and where; Kim made sure of it.

Because, you see, Kim Jong-Il was an artist. He had seen every film ever made and decided that the country he would soon inherit deserved a history worthy of the silver screen. With the completely altruistic and voluntary help of a South Korean director and his actress wife, Kim brought his vision to the people, who clamored to see each film over and over again. He looked on proudly as lavish displays of dancing, singing, and athleticism were performed both on screen and off, showing the world how these people who, though starving and sickly, still joyfully honored their dear, Dear Leader.

All the country was a stage, and Kim's people worked tirelessly to keep the cameras rolling. Each performance exemplified Juche -self-reliance- the unifying creed that made the Democratic People's Republic of Korea a guiding light of communist achievement. The whole world envied them, Kim said through his art, and his charmed and loyal people understood this and believed.



But after just 70 short years of faithfully serving his people, this creative visionary passed suddenly away. Shocked and devastated, the entire country wept and even nature itself mourned his passing; a violent snow storm stopped in its tracks, lake ice shattered, and mysterious lights danced atop the sacred mountain. Huge flocks of magpies surrounded his statue and grieved, reminding the people that their savior, having done his work for them, had completed his time on earth and moved on, to rule forever with his father as the Eternal Leaders of North Korea.



**TEDDY
BEARS'
PROTEST**

**ALEKSANDR "SASHA"
LUKASHENKO**

“Coming to you live, from Independence Square, this is Radio Free Belarus, and it’s quite a sight to see. Hundreds of teddy bears all over the ground, the fountain, everywhere; holding signs demanding the human rights that ‘Sasha 3%’ has refused us. He won’t let the people protest, so we’ll let the bears do it for us! Though it does appear as if the police are confiscating the toys....

Look up! My god! They’re falling from that little plane now, too! The signs are in English, though; I wonder where they’re from? A friend, no doubt, we’re not alone! We will rise up with our furry friends and remove the dictator from his mountaintop.

And now a little ditty from a good friend of ours, set to the tune of *Teddy Bears’ Picnic*. I think you’ll like it; may it give you hope. We can do this, friends! *Жыве Беларусь!*”





If you go down to the Square today, you're sure of a big surprise,
If you go down through the Square today, you'd better go in disguise,
For every bear that ever there was
Will gather there for certain because
Today's the day the teddy bears have their protest!

With parachutes they fill the skies as out of the planes they fall,
With signs held high they tumble down demanding free speech for all,
The teddy bears all covered in snow, they're fighting in our stead you know,
Today's the day the teddy bears have their protest!

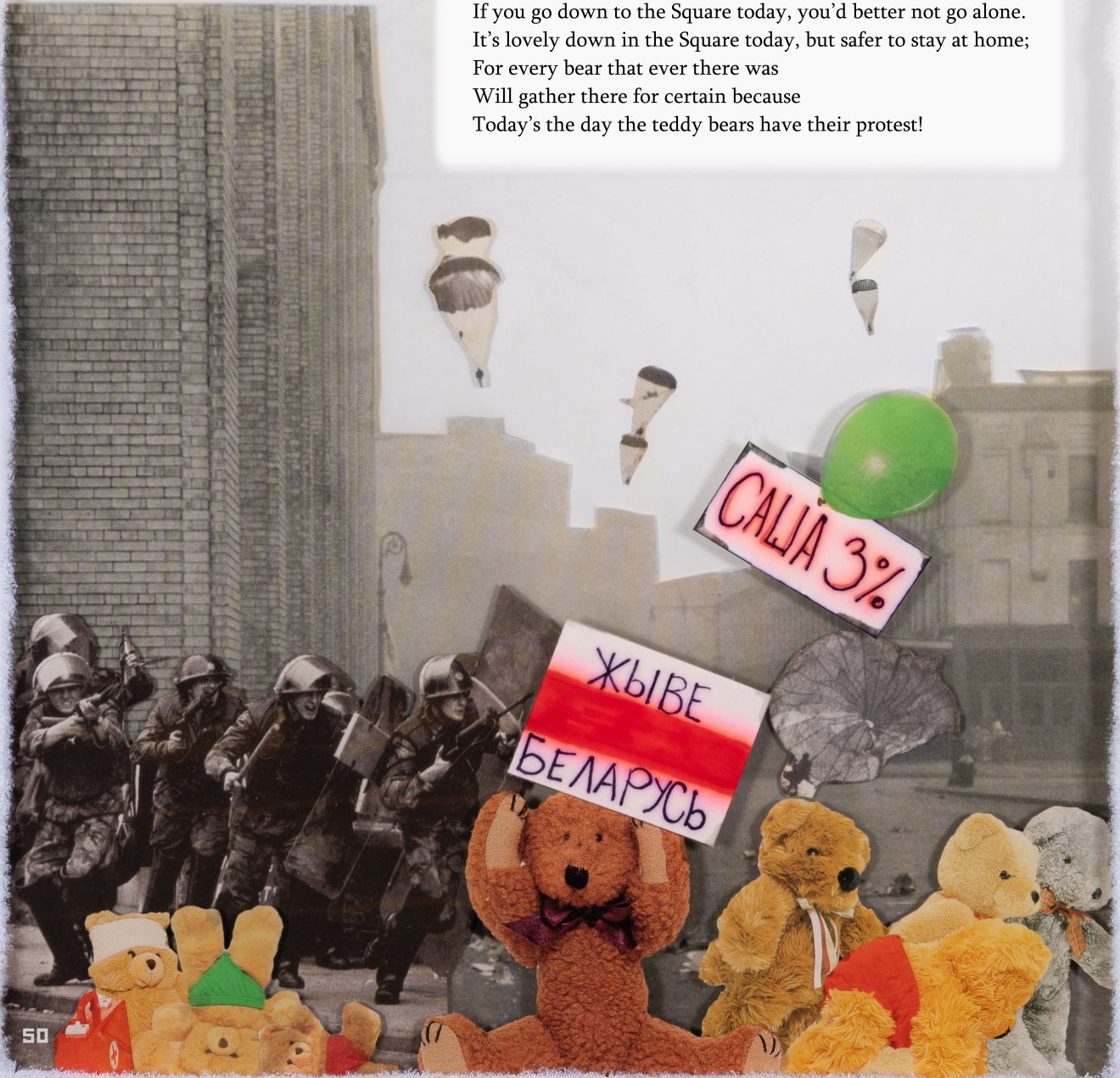
The pig farm boss turned president has kept us decades behind,
There's nothing to eat so move your feet, it's time we all speak our minds!
On the streets where everyone sees
We'll march and shout as long as we please,
That's the way the teddy bears have their protest!



Protest time for teddy bears,
The little teddy bears are having a radical time today!
Cops won't catch them unawares,
You see they're ready for a kettlin'!

See them with their handmade signs,
They fight for all mankind,
For freedom alone they care!
At six o'clock the riot cops
Will haul them all off to jail,
'Cause they're dissident little teddy bears!

If you go down to the Square today, you'd better not go alone.
It's lovely down in the Square today, but safer to stay at home;
For every bear that ever there was
Will gather there for certain because
Today's the day the teddy bears have their protest!



FERDINAND

& IMELDA

MARCOS

**— THE
STORY**

**OF —
US**

There once was a man named Ferdinand, who was the most decorated soldier in all the land; or so he would have you believe. He was strong and smart and when he left the service he became a very successful lawyer. In the course of his work he had cause to meet some of the most beautiful women in the country, and one day, from across the room, he spotted Imelda. Ferdinand greeted her with a bow, before drawing himself up to his full height. "Good," he said, "I'm taller than you. I think we should be married. One day I will be president and you will make a lovely first lady." She smiled, and politely turned him down.

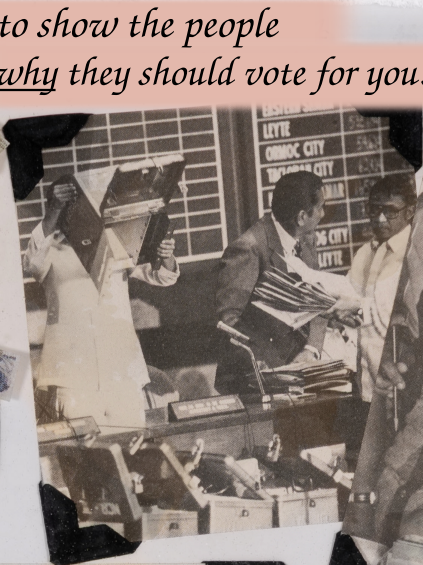
Dismayed but not dissuaded, Ferdinand proceeded to shower Imelda with flowers and gifts, each more lavish and impressive than the last. He told her how beautiful she was, made grand promises of fame and fortune and power.

"Surely you tease me, and will accept my proposal? Do you not wish to be First Lady of the Land?" Imelda, like the rest of the country, knew all about the dashing young lawyer who had assisted in his own murder trial defense, and his subsequent acquittal on technicalities. She had heard his eloquent, booming speeches and she believed he would, in fact, become president.



"I suppose I wouldn't mind," she replied, and finally, after 11 days of extravagant courtship, she accepted. Much to the dismay of his common-law wife and three children, Ferdinand and Imelda were married in secret the very next day, and they lived happily ever after.

*Sometimes you have to show the people
why they should vote for you...*



Our beautiful new home



*We can't have visitors
thinking the country
is poor,
now can we?*





*They reelected us,
and then they threw things at us!*

Savages...

Martial Law... with a smile



For 10 years

we worked hard to build our

New Society...



...and everything was fine

until Cardinal Sin

came along

and riled everybody up!



The only people who came
to our 4th inauguration
were those we paid,

just because everyone else thought we lost?!



Safe in Hawaii after those ingrates

chased us out

But we'll be back,

They haven't seen the last of the Marcos family!



FRANCISCO /
MACÍAS
NGUEMA

THOSE
WERE
—THE
DAYS

TEODORO
OBIANG
NGUEMA MBASOGO



INT. MARFIL CINEMA, MALABO, EQUATORIAL GUINEA: 8 AM
EAGER, RESTLESS ONLOOKERS INSIDE AND OUT, DECADES OF DUST IN THE MOTIONLESS AIR. FRANCISCO MACIAS NGUEMA, 55, DRESSED IN WELL-WORN, UNKEMPT SUIT, BRUSQUELY ESCORTED TO HIS SEAT BY 2 LARGE MEN WHO CLEARLY RELISH THE TASK. HIS FACE AND BEARING ARE CALM AND UNCONCERNED.

ENTER: JUDGE. TALL AND REGAL BUT UNUSED TO HIS ROBES.

AUDIENCE CHATTER GROWS.

JUDGE: Alright, everyone, *-silence please!-* let's get this show on the road. (sits, motions for others to do the same; many hadn't known to stand.)

We are here today for the trial of Francisco Macias Nguema, former President of Equatorial Guinea. Defendant was given the opportunity to select his own defense counsel; but, having waived that right, a counselor has been appointed for him by the court.

The charges are as follows:

Treason
Genocide
Mass Murder
Material Injury
Embezzlement of Public Funds
Systematic Violation of Human Rights

Mr. Nguema, you are here to be tried by a jury of your peers; how do you plead?

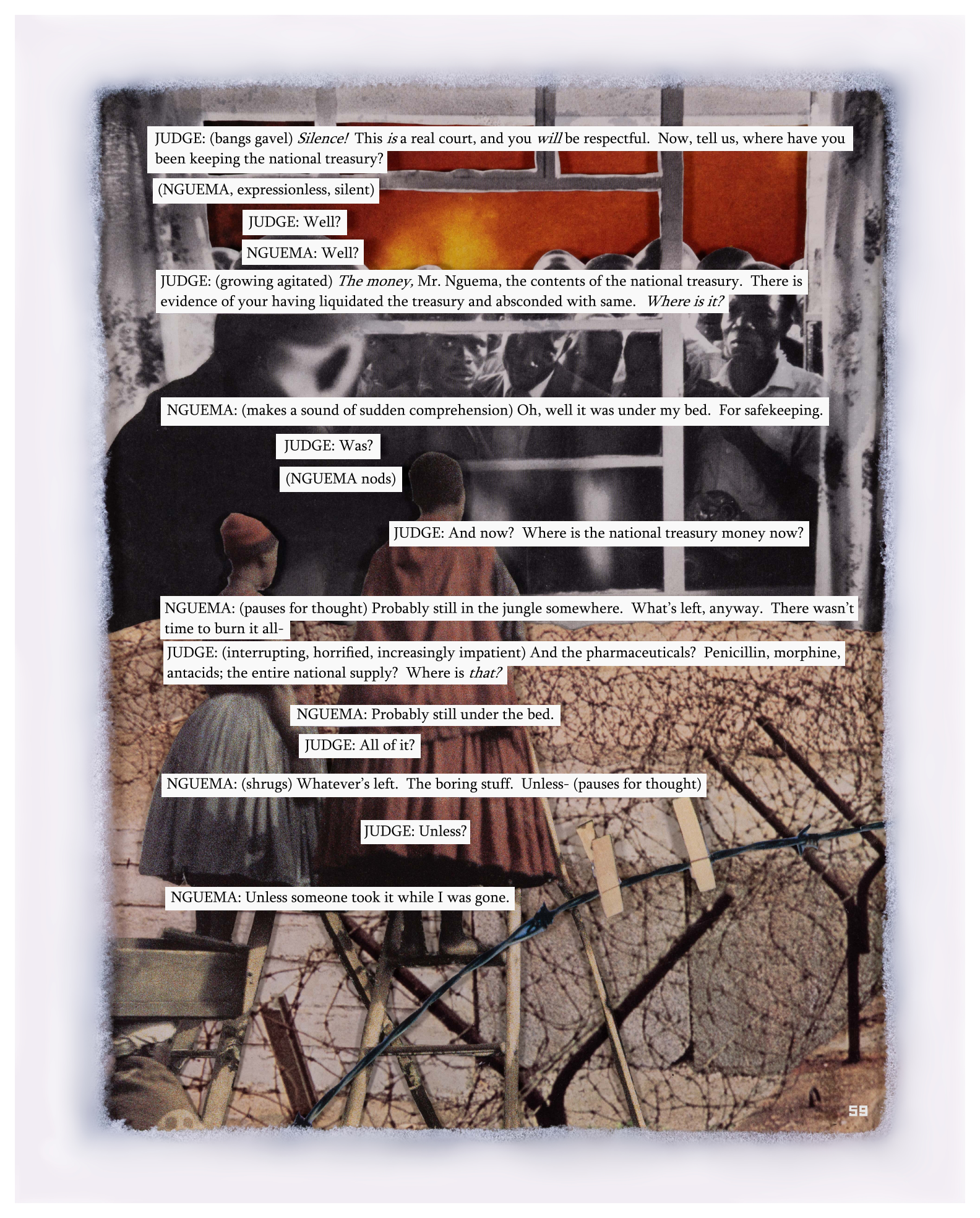
NGUEMA: I see no peers here.

JUDGE: Excuse me?

NGUEMA: I am the Only Miracle of Equatorial Guinea. There is no other God than Macias Nguema, and God has no peers. Or guilt.

JUDGE: Your plea, then, is 'Not Guilty?'

NGUEMA: Of course. And anyway, this isn't a real trial; you're not even a real judge. I know, because I got rid of all the judges, and the lawyers, too. This isn't even a courtroom- it's a movie theater!



JUDGE: (bangs gavel) *Silence!* This *is* a real court, and you *will* be respectful. Now, tell us, where have you been keeping the national treasury?

(NGUEMA, expressionless, silent)

JUDGE: Well?

NGUEMA: Well?

JUDGE: (growing agitated) *The money*, Mr. Nguema, the contents of the national treasury. There is evidence of your having liquidated the treasury and absconded with same. *Where is it?*

NGUEMA: (makes a sound of sudden comprehension) Oh, well it was under my bed. For safekeeping.

JUDGE: Was?

(NGUEMA nods)

JUDGE: And now? Where is the national treasury money now?

NGUEMA: (pauses for thought) Probably still in the jungle somewhere. What's left, anyway. There wasn't time to burn it all-

JUDGE: (interrupting, horrified, increasingly impatient) And the pharmaceuticals? Penicillin, morphine, antacids; the entire national supply? Where is *that*?

NGUEMA: Probably still under the bed.

JUDGE: All of it?

NGUEMA: (shrugs) Whatever's left. The boring stuff. Unless- (pauses for thought)

JUDGE: Unless?

NGUEMA: Unless someone took it while I was gone.



JUDGE: Someone? Like whom? Who may have taken it from under your bed?

NGUEMA: The prisoners, maybe. I don't know, I wasn't there.

JUDGE: Prisoners? Which prisoners?

NGUEMA: The ones in the basement. If they managed to escape, they probably would've wanted it.

JUDGE: (pauses in disbelief) You... kept prisoners in your basement?

NGUEMA: (smiles) What good is a private prison with no prisoners?

JUDGE: How many?

NGUEMA: How many what?

JUDGE: (nearly shouting) *Prisoners! How many prisoners were you keeping in your basement?*

NGUEMA: (thinks, fingers rise and fall as if counting) ...300? Give or take.

JUDGE: (sputters) *300?* What... Of what crimes had they been accused?

NGUEMA: (shrugs) Oh, all sorts of things, you know how these people are. Some of them were trying to flee to Cameroon.

JUDGE: To Cameroon?

(NGUEMA nods)

JUDGE: What for? Why Cameroon?

NGUEMA: To plot against me in safety. That's why I had all the boats destroyed, and the main road mined. One must nip these problems in the bud.

(JUDGE, DEFENSE, AND PROSECUTION exchange meaningful looks)



JUDGE: Your claim is that a group of 300 conspirators planned to organize against you in Cameroon; and in order to thwart their efforts, you kept them in a secret prison beneath your house. Is that correct?

NGUEMA: Well, not all of them were traitors. Some used illegal words, or continued to wear glasses even after I told them not to.

JUDGE: So, 300 people-

NGUEMA: Roughly, yes, last I checked. I haven't been home in a few weeks, though, and there were many more before them.

JUDGE: How many more?

NGUEMA: (shrugs) Oh, lots more. I kept it full so I had something to do to clear my head when things were stressful.

JUDGE: (pauses briefly) Please elaborate.

NGUEMA: Well I couldn't just go outside and take a stroll, now could I? I cordoned off the center of town for a reason, you know. Dissidents everywhere, waiting, plotting.... *Never mind* how filthy the city was. Everything falling apart and rotting away, streets full of sewage and corpses; disgusting. And then there was the island, just lousy with cholera, so I couldn't go *there*, either. You can see how few options I had left for unwinding after a long day.

JUDGE: Please clarify for the court what you mean by 'unwinding.'

NGUEMA: Punishing prisoners.

JUDGE: Punishing prisoners? You, yourself personally punished them?

NGUEMA: Of course.

JUDGE: How?

NGUEMA: (waves hand absently) Oh, however. Beatings, restraints; sometimes I just called them names, insulted their mothers, threatened their families. Nothing they didn't deserve, I assure you. I'm no monster.

PROSECUTION: (shaking, unable to refrain, voice cracking) You ordered entire villages burned to the ground!

NGUEMA: They were harboring dissidents.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: You made everyone, *the whole country*, work themselves to death on coffee and cocoa farms...!

NGUEMA: (turning in his seat to face the voice) *Collective* farms, yes. For the sake of the nation! How could our little country be competitive on the world stage without bountiful crops? Everyone must do their part for the greater good, (turns back toward JUDGE) *don't you agree?*

JUDGE: Those workers would have starved if not for the wild jungle fruit.

NGUEMA: (gesturing magnanimously) See how clever our people can be? So resourceful. I was only trying to take that cleverness and savvy and channel it into something more productive. Something *useful*. I...

JUDGE: (holds up hand for silence) I see. Well, I think I've heard enough. The jury may now take time to deliberate.

(JURY exchanging gestures and meaningful looks, unsure quite how to proceed but communicating clearly their shared agreement)

JURY MEMBER: (physically encouraged by his neighbor to stand and speak) No need, Your Honor. We find the defendant: Guilty.

(thunderous explosion of sound from AUDIENCE: clapping, stomping, hollering. JUDGE bangs gavel. Reluctant silence resumes)

NGUEMA: (standing, suddenly animated) Now wait, just a moment! Guilty? Of what? Ok sure; *perhaps* I made some mistakes here and there, I'm a man, I can admit that. But *guilty*? That's unfair! How can you hold me accountable for a few small blunders that could've happened to *anyone*?!

JUDGE: (bangs gavel until NGUEMA stops speaking) The court finds Defendant Francisco Macias Nguema GUILTY on all counts. 101 Death Sentences. Court is adjourned.

As the audience cheers a hole opens up through which Nguema can be dragged. They follow behind him, a roiling sea of animus folding back into itself and out the cinema doors, down the street and past the edge of town to Black Beach Prison.

Neither resisting nor assisting, Nguema allows himself to be carried. He begins to hum a little tune, as though he's forgotten where he is and where they're going. "Do you remember Christmas Eve, 1969?" he asks his escorts wistfully, "in the football stadium? With all the Santas and their festive little machine guns?" They give no indication that they've heard him over the din, but he continues, "And the loudspeakers playing *Those Were the Days*... I love that song! Do you remember that song?" and he begins to hum again. "So many political prisoners that day, and the Santas just mowed 'em all down!"

"...not all," growls the guard to his left. "The rest were forced to dig ditches, and then you had them buried to their necks. And then the ants..."

"Oh, the RED ants! How could I have forgotten? They were so festive, too, and *hungry*! Haha!" Nguema shakes his head gleefully as the guards confer with the firing squad, who were steadfastly refusing to do their jobs. He sings the words he can remember and badly hums the rest while a new, less superstitious squad is found and lined up and readied. His escorts leave him, and the rifles take their aim.

"THOSE WERE THE DAYS....!" Nguema cries, and then crumples. They don't even let him finish his song.





"Check him," barked Obiang to the firing squad's leader, "make sure he's dead."

The man did as he was told, nodding sagely with a finger to Nguema's bloody neck.

"Good. Thank you. You will be rewarded for accomplishing that which my men were too cowardly to do." Obiang glared at the disgraced troops. "Curses, indeed," he muttered.

With hands clasped behind him, brand-new President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo stared out at the wide ocean, as the audience began to disperse. *Today, I am the Savior*, he thought happily. A few well-placed bullets was all it had taken to rescue his long-suffering people from the tyranny of his depraved uncle; no longer would the world call Equatorial Guinea the 'Dachau of Africa.' Justice had been done, and now he could put his country to the glorious, prosperous path of democracy. Slowly, though. One can't rush these things.

Perhaps one day I'll bring back newspapers, and maybe even political parties and proper elections, he thought, once things have settled down a bit. Of course, we'll have to see. No sense upsetting them now with critical international perspectives and overwhelming responsibilities; I'll keep control of the money, and the medicine, and the oil just off the coast and all the rest until they understand how much better a leader I am than he was. There's plenty of time, God willing.

And God was willing, because Obiang was God. He turned inland and watched as his people wandered back to their homes, docile and happy, trained well to follow and praise and to question only silently and in the dead of night.

"I guess you did alright, at that," he said softly, gazing down at the past. "Thank you, Uncle. I will make you proud." With one foot he flipped the corpse over onto its belly. The movement released a fresh gush of blood out onto the sand, as the sweet, tinny strains of a familiar old tune slipped out from the loudspeakers and drifted over the nearly deserted beach.

*Those were the days, my friend
We thought they'd never end
We'd sing and dance forever and a day
We'd live the life we choose
We'd fight and never lose
Those were the days, oh yes, those were the days.*

POL

POT

HOLIDAY

IN

KAMPUCHEA

The storm, conjured from nowhere, buffets your tiny boat and deposits you ashore. This is not Bangkok, as you'd intended, but your boat is worthless now, full of holes, so you grab what you can and begin to walk. The beach is beautiful, all white sand and blue water, banyan trees towering in the distance, and not a soul around. Even the birds are strangely silent, the monkeys calm and apprehensive, observing your progress.

Days and nights begin to blend and still you're in the forest, alone. A road appears through the trees up ahead and you follow it, grateful, because surely it must lead somewhere. You bless the mangoes and bananas, the coconuts and lychee. At least there's plenty of food to be found.

The road is winding, rough dirt and wheel tracks, the forest around giving way to a landscape, lunar in its pockmarked desolation. Here and there are scattered incongruent trappings of forgotten lives: abandoned cars, their doors hanging open; suitcases struggling to contain fluttering clothing; everything covered in dust. A crippled piano provides a perch for a long-legged marsh bird, the lamp nearby standing at determined attention. What has happened here, you wonder, as your surrounding thicken with misplaced civilization.

You're climbing over cars now, over abandoned handcarts piled high with belongings, but there are buildings ahead and voices waft past. Finally.



A little man in black cotton clothes, rubber tire sandals on his feet and a red checked scarf around his neck smiles warmly and beckons you over. He greets you in impeccable French, you respond haltingly in kind. You're on holiday, you explain, but things have gone a bit sideways and you've been walking for days. With a slight bow he leads you into the city, promising food and shelter for anyone in need. You hold up your last banana, laughing, and he scowls, takes it, tosses it aside. It is a crime to forage, he says; and besides, there is no need.

The voices grow gradually louder, and as you round a corner you see a wave of black cotton descending upon the city. Their faces are worn, expressionless, somewhat ill at ease. They are covered head to toe in jungle grime, carrying sharpened sticks and pilfered guns, with which they methodically take control of each intersection, each building, each road. The people around you are terrified, shrieking and pleading, but the black mass maintains an eerie silence as windows shatter, doors burst their hinges, and the herd is shepherded north; the way you're headed, too.

"Your timing is unfortunate," your guide says sadly, "things are a bit chaotic right now. Soon, though.... Soon this will be the purest, happiest land in all the world!" He smiles and pats your shoulder, "please don't fear, you're safe with me." Everyone around you regards you both as though you don't exist at all.

The crowd continues to grow; families, children, the sick and dying carried until they cannot be. A bit of food here and there, some water from a muddy puddle, the people with salvaged belongings ordered periodically to relinquish them and you begin to understand the grotesque decoration outside the town. Your guide says little, but soon leads you away from the crowd and down a smoothly finished dirt road. You notice others being led away as well, and almost manage to convince yourself that those pops and crackles echoing back are not gunshots, surely; and even if they are they're completely unrelated.



Soon, a village, tucked into the trees and invisible until you stumble upon it, ringed with booby traps and pitfalls full of sharpened sticks. The town is a maze of crooked little wooden houses, built on stilts, joined by flimsy bamboo walkways just above the level of the swamp. There seem to be dozens of ways in and out, plenty of places to hide, perfect for one who wishes to remain anonymous. The people here are also dressed in black, bent and toiling, dead eyes following you toward the only permanent structure in sight.

"The cafeteria." You are led inside and served a meal of thin rice soup with a small hunk of meat plopped in. Those eating around you eye that meat jealously, and you suck it down in hopes that they will stop. As you eat you're given a uniform, black cotton and rubber sandals, and told what work you are to do in order to eat again. "Everyone works," your guide explains, "we must all work together to build a better world." You insist you cannot stay, friends are awaiting you in Bangkok; you're grateful but must be going soon. He smiles, shrugs, and wanders off.

You're alone again, and no one stops you as you leave. Nor is anyone surprised when, days later, you wander back into the village dressed in black, a red checkered scarf around your neck and rubber sandals on your feet, asking for work and food because you are perfectly, hopelessly lost. Your guide greets you warmly, and a voice nearby calls him First Brother Pol. He thanks you for returning, and shows you to your hut.



**VIDKUN
QUISLING**



**— A —
OUTIFUL
DUPE**



It is not true, as rumors have it, that he shook hands with each member of the firing squad; he was, however, very surprised to find himself before them at all.

You see, Vidkun was a patriot, and he dearly loved his country. He didn't care much for the king, it's true, or many of the people who came from faraway places to his home of snow and ice. The government, too, had lost its way, and no longer cared for the lands that had been lost long ago to time and war. He knew his country deserved better.

That is why, when foreign troops rolled into the capital and the king fled to the north, Vidkun seized his moment with relish. As the radio crackled out news of the invasion, he gleefully announced his coup; his party of patriots would take up the burden of command, with Vidkun as its Führer, and lead Norway into a future as glorious as its past. After all, he was liked by the leader of the current invasion, and surely *that* Führer would support his cause. Right?



Right. For about 3 days he did support Vidkun's coup, and for 3 more days he ignored it. On the 7th day Hitler replaced Vidkun with one of his own men, who allowed Vidkun to call himself the Minister President.

A more enthusiastic puppet could not have been found to 'lead' the Nordic people, and Vidkun immediately began changing policy, plotting the expansion of Norway, and sending Jews and teachers to concentration camps. Well, the Germans did these things and Vidkun did his best to take credit for them. Either way, this suited Hitler well enough, and he largely ignored Vidkun and the Norwegians for the duration of the war. After all, there were more important matters to attend to, other leaders less inclined to come to heel, greener, better lands to conquer. Try as he did, none of Vidkun's brilliant plans for the Reich received more than the passing glance they deserved.

Vidkun really did his best for Hitler and Norway, following all the German decrees and standing up to the displeasure of the people. No one cared, despite his zeal; the eagerness with which he tried to fix a nation headed for socialism didn't seem to matter. But he knew that surely, one day, they all would understand.

And understand they did. To this very day, in many different languages, a 'quisling' is a traitor on a scale both pitiable and grand.



**JUAN MANUEL DE
ROSAS**

**A HELL IN —
MINIATURE**

Once, long ago, there lived a man as handsome as he was rich. Such men are not uncommon in our world and are often rewarded for these traits over which they have little influence and deserve no credit. Juan Manuel de Rosas was just such a man, and he reveled in this privilege, seizing every opportunity for advancement with a hand no less skilled for its unwarranted advantage. His soul belonged to the gauchos in his employ with whom he socialized, donning their costumes and speaking their rough-edged language while never casting doubt on his authority over them. They respected him, and followed him loyally, into and out of battles and coups, forming the foundation on which he was to build his empire.

Juan pined for this ragged, wild lifestyle, but believed deeply in hierarchy and authority, the conservative values upheld by his wealthy compatriots. These landed fellows saw his solidarity and maneuvered him into the office from which he led Buenos Aires with an unapologetic and dictatorial hand. What he lacked in ingenuity he made up for in bureaucratic craft, refusing a constitution and removing the voices of those who he felt deserved no say. He saw democracy as chaos, and sought to restore the old order of the land.



There was disagreement, at first, and Juan lost his position of supreme authority over Buenos Aires. He was given an army and sent into the desert to enforce his brand of law amongst the indigenous tribes. He did not kill them unless they refused to comply, and did not enjoy the killing but understood its cause and submitted to the inevitability, his gauchos riding along beside him.

Back in Buenos Aires, however, his supporters continued to grow. They ousted the new leader, insisting on the reinstatement of their beloved dictator. Having already reduced elections to a simple rubber stamp affair, Juan returned to an overwhelming display of support, both at the polls and in the streets. With a smile and a benevolent wave he accepted the will of his people. He knew full well how vital a rigged election was to maintaining order among a populace.



Buenos Aires became a city of red; not of blood, but of cloth. Caps and jackets and trousers, ribbons and decorations for the horses, badges and sideburns and fake mustaches- the citizens were marked with the visible indicators of cultural unity, of *Rosismo*. The buildings, likewise, were bathed in red. The city thus beautified, Juan wasted no effort on improving the lives of his people; excepting, of course, those of his social and economic status. His approval saw little negative impact, however, with the gauchos and blacks and lower class folks continuing to support his regime in the face of diminished public resources and a slave trade revival. He still enjoyed partaking of the quaintness of their culture, which for a while was enough to placate them. In this and other ways Juan helped build the nation of Argentina.

As his power and prestige grew unbounded, so too did his paranoia and isolation. Dissent bloomed large around him, and those set on removing him gradually banded together. The now-predictable pattern of the sequestered despot unfolded, and Juan became less and less willing to engage with his opponents. The downward slide continued as it must, and the once-omnipotent leader was forced to flee, disguised as a common man aboard a ship to Britain. He died, embittered but oddly content, living the modest existence of an English tenant farmer. While not quite the gaucho he idealized in boyhood, he had nevertheless found a place in which he could be the biggest fish in a pond that catered exclusively to him; and this, after all, had been the goal all along.



**JOSEPH VISSARIONOVICH
STALIN**

**COMRADE KOBRA
PAYS A VISIT**

Sofia pulled the shawl tighter around her prison-thin shoulders as Sergo, her husband, stumbled home, dragging the cold in with him. It had been months since their release, but she hadn't yet managed to find the weight she'd lost. "Where have you been?" she asked, "it's nearly dawn!"

"Sitting," he slurred, "and we have guests."

"Sitting," he says!" A deep voice chuckled from the corridor, "he always finds time to sit!" The owner of the voice strutted in, followed closely by several silent shadows. He embraced Sofia. "Sofyushka, how are you? It's been so long.... Much too long!"

Sofia gasped. "Comrade Stalin, I- we-"

"What is this, 'Stalin?'" Call me Koba, like always," he insisted, "we are still friends, are we not?" She nodded. They both looked to Sergo, who also nodded. "Of course we are, even though...." he paused, "well, you didn't *really* want to kill me, did you?" Koba asked sadly, earnestly.

"Do you really think so?" asked Sergo, "do you really think we could? We are friends, we always have been!"



Koba grinned, clearly relieved. "And where is that lovely daughter of yours, is she here? Do you spoil her?"

"She sleeping," Sofia said, "I'll wake her." She hurried off to find Maya, who was no longer asleep.

"They've come to arrest us at night?" she asked.

"No, no," her mother replied, "Stalin's come."

"I won't meet him," said Maya, knowing full well why she'd spent the last several years without her parents. "I have nothing to say to him."

"You must," Sofia hissed, grabbing her child by the wrist, "he's a historical personage." They returned to the kitchen, and Koba beamed.

"Ah, it's you- 'Pioneer Kavtaradze,'" he said, referencing the letter she'd sent on her parents' behalf, so long ago, appealing for their freedom, "you write beautifully." His smile was friendly, paternal, and in spite of herself Maya felt herself charmed. She accepted the seat next to him, and they chatted lightly until the food and drink he'd ordered from a nearby Georgian restaurant arrived.

"Tell me, Koba, how is your mother? Have you seen her?" Sofia asked.

"Ah, Keke," he sighed with a laugh, "she's just the same as ever." He popped a piece of bread into his mouth, chewed, said, "she asked me what it was I did, can you believe it?" His audience laughed, Maya most of all, her anxiety all but evaporated now. "I told her I was something like a Tsar, so she could understand, and you know what she said?"

"That you should've been a priest?" suggested Sergo, who had known Keke for most of his life.

Koba nearly laughed himself off his seat. "Precisely!" he bellowed, "she still, even now, insists I should have been a priest!" He wiped tears from his eyes, "perhaps she's right, at that."



One of the men who had arrived with Koba, having kept himself until this moment on guard at the door, stepped inside and handed his boss a piece of paper. With a whisper he pulled a red wax crayon from his coat pocket and handed it over. Koba skimmed the sheet, his eyes darkening. He made a few marginal notes, and signed the bottom with a flourish before handing back both paper and crayon. He sighed.

"I really should be going," he said, embracing his friends one at a time, kissing cheeks, shaking hands. "That rotten son of mine thinks he can throw the family name around like a weight and get whatever he wants." Koba sighed again, shook his head. "How can I make him understand that he is not Stalin? That not even *I* am Stalin?" There was genuine sadness in his honey-colored eyes as he gazed out the window at the impotent sun rising over the Kremlin, warming nothing but impressing upon them all the lateness of the hour. "No need for school today, hm?" he tapped Maya's nose, "get some sleep. It was so good to see you all." And with that he strutted out, shadows at his heels, seeming none the worse for his long and liquored evening.

The Kavtaradzes watched him leave in exhausted silence, Sofia again pulling her shawl tighter around her thin shoulders as the crisp morning flooded into the wake left by their dear friend; the warm and ruthless Koba, the man the whole world knew as Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin.



THE PATRON SAINT
— OF —
YUGOLAND

JOSIP
BROZ
TITO

"...but suddenly the right flank yielded and through the gap poured the cavalry. Before we knew it they were thundering through our positions, leaping from their horses and throwing themselves into our trenches with lances lowered. One of them got me, just here—" he pointed to a spot on his back, below his left arm, "—and I fainted. I learned later that just as the enemy began to butcher the wounded, even slashing them with their knives, the Russian infantry reached the positions and put an end to that bloody orgy." The stranger took a long drink and set down the empty glass. It vanished and a fresh one took its place.

"That's some luck you've got," remarked one of his listeners dryly.

"Shall we talk about luck?" asked the stranger, whomping his beer on the bar top. "I'll tell you, Lady Luck is a good friend of mine. Once, after I'd escaped from the prison in Omsk, the police boarded my train looking for me."

"No one escapes the gulag," someone said, "everyone knows that."



"Ah, but *I* did!" he paused for a dubious round of chuckles from his audience before continuing. "Several times, actually. This time they were fooled by my perfect command of русским языком," he shrugged, "but usually the forged passports work fine. I didn't have one with me that time, obviously."

"You speak Russian, too?" A new voice, this one less skeptical.

"Конечно!" he laughed, "some lovely schoolgirls taught me while I was recovering in hospital, from the stabbing," he gestured to his back again with glee. "They brought me Tolstoy and Turgenev, of course, and other classics."

More chuckles, still tinged with disbelief but he felt them coming around. The whole bar had inched closer and abandoned other conversations in favor of his stories.

"You're full of it," the first man said simply, "and I don't believe a word you've said."

"Suit yourself," the stranger shrugged, "you wouldn't be the first." He took another swig. One man was asked to settle up his tab and began to argue, saying they'd cut his wages again and he wouldn't have the money until the end of the week.



"You should go on strike!" declared the stranger, "I'd love to help, I've organized a strike or two in my day."

"Of course you have," grumbled the skeptic.

"I have! Once I was to work in Brno, had a job lined up and everything, but when I got there I found out they were importing cheap labor so as not to pay a living wage to the locals. That's the strike I'm most proud of; it was a wild success, but there were many others besides. It's a bit of a hobby, really," he laughed, "so if you want my help...?"

"We should do *something*," said the penniless man, "but it's such a risk. Perhaps Russia has it right, after all; at least they all have guaranteed jobs and housing. Who needs income when the State provides enough for everyone?"

The stranger sighed and shook his head. "No, Stalin is no friend to the working man. Trust me, I've met him; he's as ruthless as they come and utterly unconcerned with the fact that his people are starving. The lucky ones, anyway. No, look to Yugoslavia if you want an example of communism that works!" A couple men cheered, clinking glasses with their new friend, while others waited for an explanation.

"I've heard the people cannot speak freely, just like under Stalin. I've heard that Tito of theirs is just as ruthless, just as unconcerned...."

"Well, friend, you've heard wrong. Sure, we can't have everyone venting their spleens about the government all the time, causing a ruckus for the average citizen; but even the dissenters get food and clothing and jobs, everyone does. And everyone is happy, by and large."

"You've been?"

"You could say that, yes."



"Just a second," interrupted a new addition to the audience, "you said you'd met Stalin himself?"

"Sure, and Hitler, too. Smart men, but it's hard to agree with their choices. And as clever as they are, neither has managed to kill me yet!" He smiled broadly and took a drink.

"Hitler and Stalin have tried to kill you? What for?"

The stranger laughed again. "Oh, so many times, for so many reasons. They don't like that I disagree with them, they don't like that I'm more clever. I've asked them to stop, but I'm expecting a fresh attempt soon; that's why I'm holed up in your charming little village for the time being."

"But why? Why would they care enough to have you killed? What's so special about you?"

A grin, slow and feline, spread across the stranger's face. He shrugged. "They've each murdered millions, what's one more? And like I said, I've opposed them many times, spoken my mind and stood my ground. From the workers' strikes to secret missions for subversive groups, all the way up to head of state."

"Head of state? Which state? Are you trying to tell us you're a ruler, too?"

"Well yes, of course, and my people love me dearly. They send me letters, prayers almost, and even made me president for life!"

A groan welled up from the listeners. "Oh, now you've gone too far!" cried one, "you can't expect us to believe that, too!" They laughed and jeered, shaking their heads and settling their tabs to head home for the night. "Good stories, though," they said, several men patting him solidly on the back as they left, "come back and tell us more sometime, if you're around."

The stranger smiled, shook hands, said goodnight. He pulled out a few notes for his bill which were waved away by the bartender. "Sir, your money's no good here," he said, "and it's been an honor to serve you."

The stranger nodded in gratitude. "Call me Tito," he said, "all my friends do."



**FARM TO
TABLE
FASCISM**

**KÄRLIS
ULMANIS**

Once upon a time, there was a very strange boy named Kārlis. He lived on a farm outside of town with his mother and his brothers, taking care of the cows that his father had left them when he died. Kārlis and his brothers went to school in the village, and though everyone thought they were nice boys, they were all a bit afraid of Kārlis. You see, Kārlis was quiet and serious and very, very smart. He wasn't much good at games and he didn't like to join in when the other boys smoked or drank or teased each other. He didn't talk much at all, so the teachers and other students didn't know quite what to do with him.



As he grew up, Kārlis found that there were two things about which he was passionate: his country, and his cows. After dodging the draft and joining in the revolution, he fled to America to wait out the political storm. He knew he'd return, longed for it; but in the meantime he went to college in a Midwest prairie, and later bought himself some cows and set up a dairy farm down South. It was a good little farm, full of good little cows, and he took great care of his bovine friends until he was told it was safe to return to his home. That's not to say, however, that he left the South behind him. No, in fact, as he rose through the ranks of the Latvian government on his way to Prime Minister, he set up a 4-H program and designated an arbor day, among other American traditions he had grown to love.

He spent many years in politics, and he did his jobs well, though he was still a bit strange. People often asked him why he never married, and he told them simply, "I am married to Latvia, and that is enough for me."

And it really was enough. Always soft spoken and dressed in humble clothes, he served his country uncommonly well, making sure to praise and support the teachers, farmers, and all women (and especially the women farmers) at every opportunity.

One day he sat with the President and said, "The other European countries are more developed than we are. Perhaps it would serve our people well if we follow the example of our neighbors."

The President thought a moment, and shrugged. "I suppose it's worth a shot, Prime Minister. I trust your judgment."



And so it was decided, with a little help from the military, that once the President had finished out his term strange little Kārlis would take over as both President *and* Prime Minister, and would rule the country alone. To begin with he removed the radicals from both political extremes, including Social Democrats and Nazi supporters, and put them into prison camps. He tried them, and released many, giving others light sentences for their treason. Everyone else he grouped according to their strengths -farmers, laborers, scientists- and censored all media. Political parties were no longer needed, and so he dissolved them, even his own. The government, he decided, was not there simply to serve his whims, and while he did have final say in all things, he made special effort to include the people and his cabinet on those decisions.

He wanted 'Latvia for Latvians,' but this, for Kārlis, did not mean that non-Latvians should be targeted or removed. He simply wanted the best for his people, with a special focus on those native to the land from which he, himself, had come.

Kārlis meditated on these things, and the life he had devoted wholly to his people, as the Russians marched in to depose him. He thought much about his cows, and his country, and the love he gave to each as he was jailed, sentenced, and allowed to die in exile somewhere out in the vast Russian Steppes. Several villages lay claim to his grave, but no one knows for sure where the peaceful, agrarian fascist rests eternal.



HITLER
— OF THE —
PAMPA

JORGE RAFAEL
VIDELA

Augusto's Condor had been keeping busy, as there was still much to do.

Observing patiently as Argentina's ruler slipped slowly into senility and death, the Condor chose his successor: the most recent heir to an illustrious political lineage, a man by the name of Jorge. Civil war raged throughout his country, fertilizing the ground with blood in preparation for the change; the Condor and its new friend watched with pleasure, having had little hand in the war's inception but delighted with the outcome nevertheless.

True to form, the Condor drifted lazily above the chaos, scooping up students by the hundreds and spiriting them away to locations forever lost or merely dropping them headlong into the sea. The beast enjoyed the latter game immensely, and played whenever possible; stopping only occasionally to protect Jorge from those who wished him harm.



Time passed and the civil war burned itself out, having taken many dissident lives along with it. This excuse for brutality, so convenient at the time, left more of the same in its wake and the Condor continued to watch, and wait, and silently work its particular brand of grisly magic. It turned its attention to the children born to the captive guerrilla soldiers, gathering them up and doling them out to those who could better be trusted with their care. This was Jorge's idea; he insisted the women had intentionally fallen pregnant in an attempt to save themselves, and this simply would not do. The mothers were discarded quickly and without ceremony.

While the Condor busied itself with the children, Jorge turned his attention to the Jews. He targeted them, chased them out and away and into prisons, encouraging the men beneath him to embrace their hateful tendencies and recreate an atmosphere not seen since the 1940s. It mattered little where their political loyalties lay, these Jews; friend and foe alike were harassed and punished for their lineage. Jorge gleefully accepted the title of 'Hitler of the Pampa;' he made no apologies for any of it, but claimed it fully and with pride. His time in power was spent on nothing but maintaining that power, and unlike many of his predecessors throughout the world, he left the tedious matters to his fellows. The economy, healthcare, quality of life; these things were beneath him, and held no interest for him. It did not matter what the people thought or wanted, what mattered only was his status and his powerful winged friend.



But the Condor's interest began to wane, and it turned its attentions elsewhere. Jorge had things under control, and there were other leaders in need of support. Fully convinced of his eternal sovereignty, Jorge allowed the relationship to disintegrate.... It came, therefore, as something of a shock when he was brought to trial upon retirement and condemned to life in prison. He believed in himself to the end, though, and made no pretense otherwise. No one knows for sure if he really slipped and fell in the prison shower, fracturing bones and succumbing therefrom; or if, perhaps, the Condor was there too, releasing its friend from captivity. The Condor's compassion was indeed boundless, so long as its end was served.



**GENERAL
U NE
WIN**

**MIDNIGHT —IN—
MYANMAR**

I am not at all sure what I have done to warrant such a penance; what sins my past self committed that cast me in my present shape.

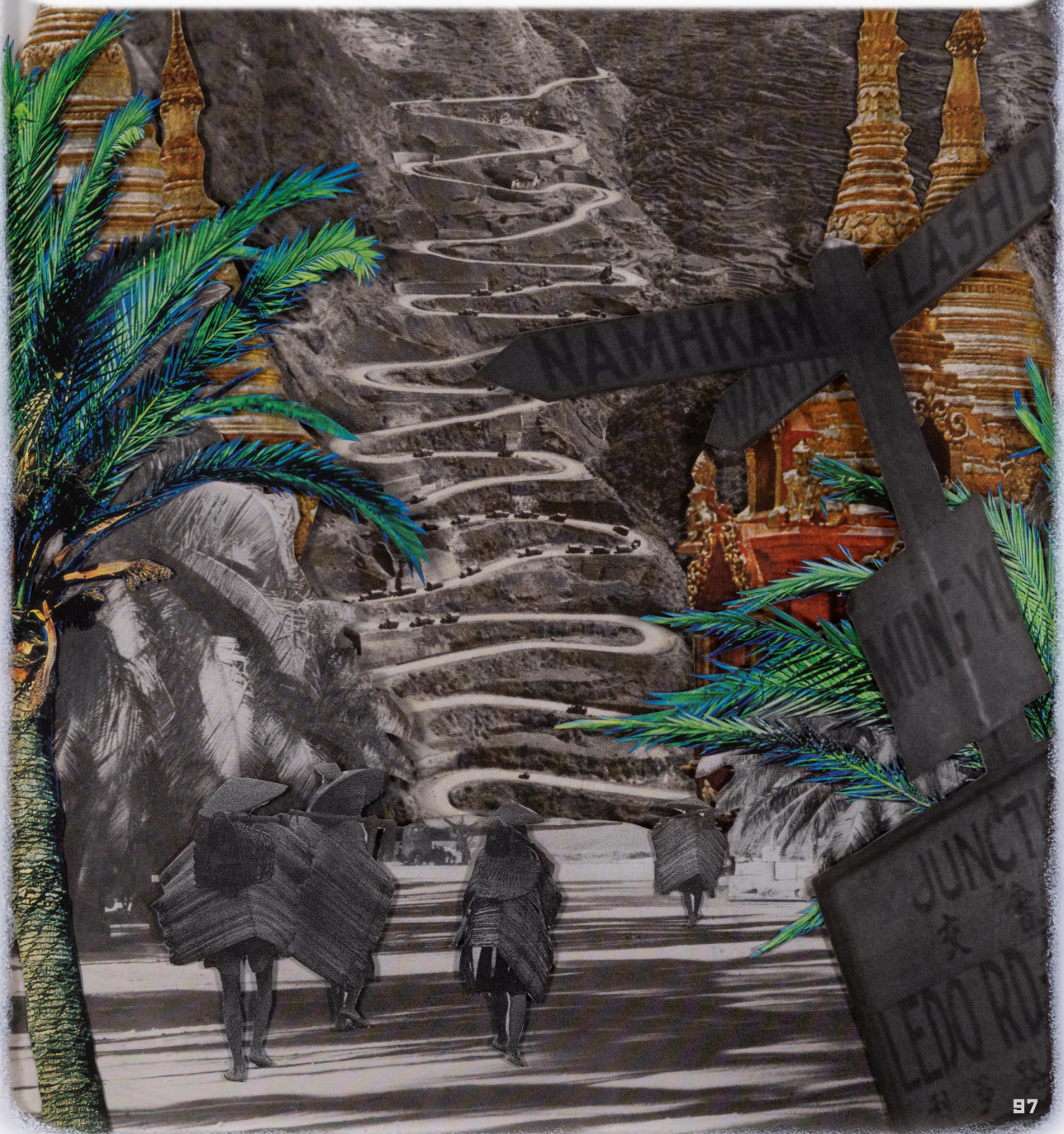
I saw the British wash their hands of us, drying them on the Union Jack, lowered for the final time. I celebrated with the others, embracing our glittering new independence as the silent and uncertain void filled in behind broad departing backs.

For a time, everything was fine. I used this cursed form of mine to give structure to newly untethered lives, keeping in mind both our ancestral spirits and our Buddha, the old ways and the new. For a while, everything was fine.



But my people are many and varied, and perhaps we were not meant to remain united beneath our crisp new flag. Our paths remained shrouded in the pregnant fog that settles heavy over the rich and fertile Irrawaddy Basin.

O, Abo, Revered Father, General U Ne Win: you saw our path -a single path, together- clearly, in spite of us. You lined us up and pointed us along the Burmese Way to Socialism. You even made use of my wretched self, twisted and primitive but in touch with the spirits and the old ways; for in your wisdom you knew better than to abandon them wholesale.



Did you believe in the rites you performed, followed to the letter of instruction? Was it for the sake of our peoples' superstition that the currency was limited to multiples of 9, that you caused even the traffic to alter its flow away from unlucky left? Was it for my poor sake you shot your own image in mirrors, carried a coffin round the Shwedagon Pagoda in the dead of night, walked backwards over each newly built overpass? What of the cradle, or the inglorious hut in which you occasionally slept? For whom did you bathe in blood?

The numbers that I gave to you, the formulae, the spells; they imbued you with a power far beyond the abject fear of our people. But your Tatmadaw, those loyal soldier boys in their fine regalia and sharp-pressed garb; they, too, found vim and vigor in our magic, but they lack your ingenuity. Their markets flooded and bloomed, as vital to your peoples' existence as they were -officially- illegal.

26 years of these strange dichotomies: bare necessities unobtainable but through the illegal enterprises of the military whose only other apparent purpose is subjugation of those same people to whom they sell; a Buddhist monolith harshly condemning the very dark arts which serve to bolster it and shroud the whole enterprise from the critical eyes of the outside world. Do they see what has happened here, what you have done to me? O, Aun, I hope they cannot see through your ritual curtains; for if they can see, it means they do not care.



Would that I knew what I had done to earn this woeful fate. Was I not a faithful servant as rugged little Burma? Whom have I displeased? Because now, as Myanmar, I am less than a street urchin, whose own antique sorcery is being used against me.

Have I paid my penance yet?



XI

JINPING

SILK ROAD

TO

NOWHERE



The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step: So says the ancient proverb, and so it is today.

Travel the Silk Road, as others before you have done for centuries, begin ever mindful whence you've come. Coarse village life, ever beholden to those who have more than you do and who aim to keep it so. Walk beside rebels and visionaries who sought to invert this cruel dynamic, those for whom they fought lying dead and dying in their wake.

In your wake.

See Mao on his mountaintop, piecing together the great machine that leaps and bounds along the Road, dragging with it all those same people -and more- wrenching them through the rapidly shifting landscape.

Pulling you through, too.



The Road is slick with blood and some of that blood has taken on a different hue; Islam green and vivid yellow, mirroring the forest of umbrellas to the left and sunflower fields to the right. The rest, if not Communist Red, is the sharp, stark white of death.

Your death? Could have been, but won't be if you stay true to the Road. The gates to the city lie before you, just ahead; you can hear the fanfare already. They have come to welcome you.

Sleek black cars pull out in front of you, their blue lights flashing, clearing the way forward. People around you gawk and stare, they take pictures of themselves with you in the background so that everyone will know they were there. Brand new posters glisten on telephone poles advising that foreigners could be spies, and screens flash and blink from all directions with the final round of a game show. Do you know the answers? You would if you'd downloaded the app like you were told, it says it in the name: *Study Xi, Strengthen China*. You learned all this in school, this Xi Jinping Thought; or you would have, had you been paying attention.

A new screen, pulled from your pocket, shows your social credit score dropping, but there's so much noise, so much going on.... People are still taking pictures, never mind the sly pretenses, they're still paying attention. They really seem to care.



Another set of gates and as you pass through, feet still married to that new Silk Road, the din cuts out with a suddenness that's jarring. Now all is silence and calm, smooth green lawns and burbling fountains, the cars left off at the entrance and you are once again alone.

Well, mostly alone. Ushers appear and vanish beside you, showing the way through arched doorways and across plush carpets as though you needed guidance, as though the path was not fixed and clear. The last one in line bows deeply, but not to you; there before you stands the Man behind the Thought.

The Pope of the Party, Godfather of the Great Wall. He knew you were coming and he knows who you are; better, in fact, than you know yourself. He smiles warmly, shakes your hand and gently pulls you past and you realize there are more behind you awaiting his attentions. A door closes softly and you stand there dazed, the prickling frenzy draining away, all around you now are the backs of buildings that no one's meant to see.

You're still on the Road and you realize you always will be.

Move along please. No loitering.



**MINISTER
MENTOR**

**LEE
KUAN
YEW**

**— A —
SINGA
PORE
STORY**

"Before 1819 nothing happened," he said, stroking the hair of his only granddaughter, who lay curled up in his lap. She'd asked for a story, and this was the best story he knew. "After that, from beyond our shores came the British, and then the Japanese. From within came the communists; everyone was trying to bring us down, to take over and turn the country into what *they* thought it should be, whether the people who were already here liked it or not."

"That's not very nice," she said. He nodded.

"It wasn't. But the, in 1965, everything changed."

"Everything?"

"Everything."

"Is that when you became grampa for everyone?" She looked into his face, eyes shining. He chuckled.

"Well, yes, I guess you could say that. I became Prime Minister a little while earlier, but after Malaysia forced us to be independent—"

The little girl interrupted him. "Isn't it a good thing to be independent? Didn't you want to be?"



He smiled, put a finger conspiratorially to his lips. "Yes, of course, but it makes a better story this way." She nodded knowingly and settled back in to listen. "As a brand-new country, we had nothing; no land to speak of, lots of people but no jobs for them to do and not enough places for them to live. Most of them hadn't even been to school!" He paused, expecting this to shock her. When it didn't, he continued. "We were so small, so vulnerable; all the foreigners I mentioned before were just waiting for us to fail. They wanted us to fail, so they could come take over again."

"But you didn't let them," she said, "you fixed all those things!"

"That's right. I had many smart people working with me.... But even then, *everything was against us!*" He shook her shoulders gently as he said this, and she giggled. "So what do you do when the whole world is against you?"

She shrugged.

"You must become *indispensable* to them!"

"Indispensable?"

"Something they can't live without. We had sea ports, and big plans. We invested what little money we had into making people's lives better, keeping them safe and happy and healthy, and then those people made things. They made things to sell, developed new technologies, and perfected a system of shipping that made it so Singapore connected the entire world to itself. Suddenly, they needed us even more than we needed them!"



"And everyone was so happy and thankful that you did such a good job!" Crowed his granddaughter.

"Well, not everyone," he admitted, "but that's what the Speaker's Corner is for."

"What's that?"

"It's a special place where people can go and criticize the government, if they wish."

Her face scrunched up in thought. "There's a place just for people to say mean things about you?"

He laughed. "Sort of, yes. Sometimes people just need to say things out loud, even if they know they're not true things."

"But why?"

"Well, it makes them feel better, I suppose. But it wouldn't do to have people saying these things all over, anytime they felt like it, so that's what the Speaker's Corner is for. It's really very important to separate life from politics, you know."

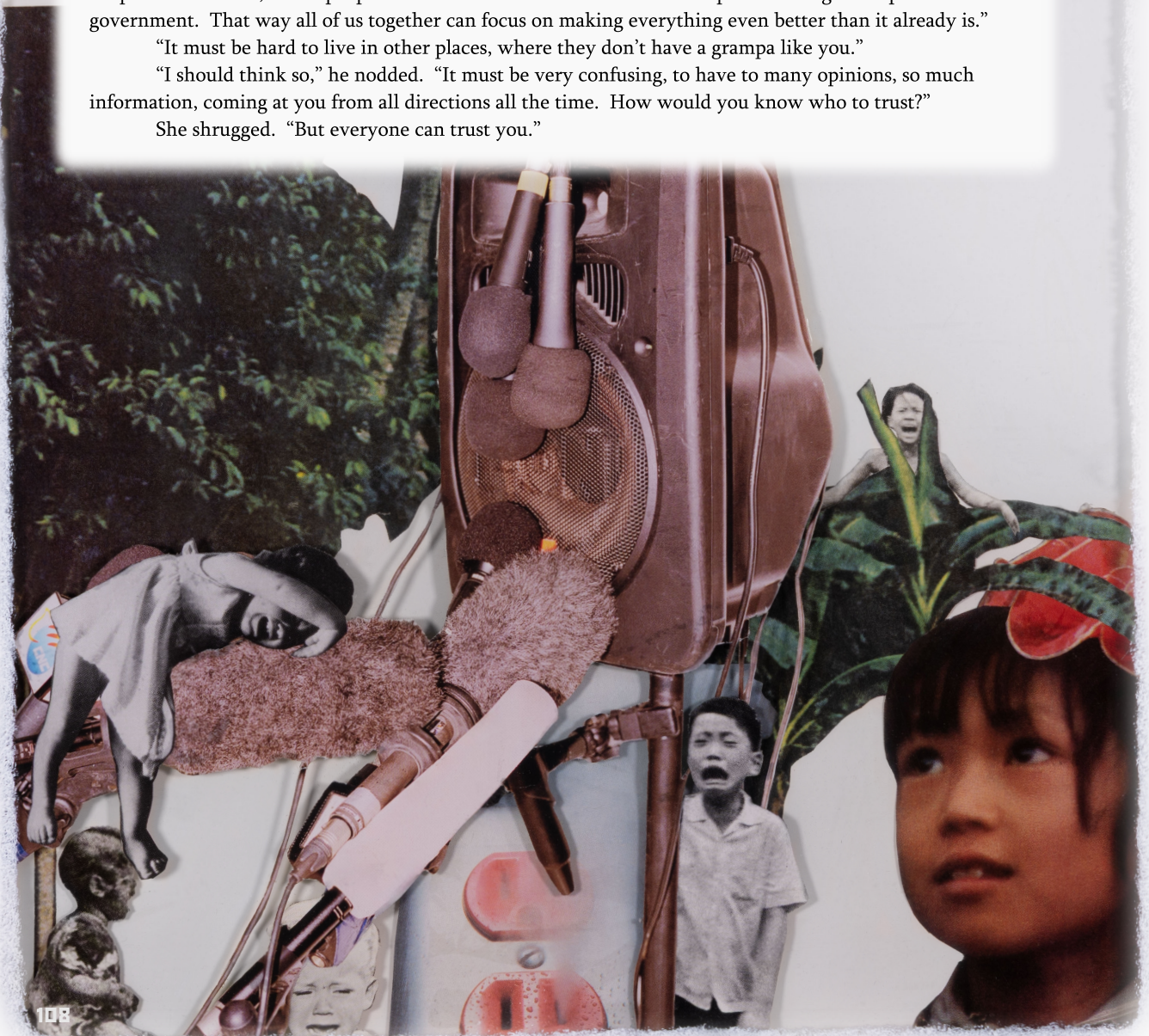
"How come?"

"Because everyone's busy making their own lives nice, there's no need to bother them with the things I take care of. I spent lots of time choosing just the right people to help me make our little country simple and efficient, so the people can concern themselves with more important things than politics and government. That way all of us together can focus on making everything even better than it already is."

"It must be hard to live in other places, where they don't have a grampa like you."

"I should think so," he nodded. "It must be very confusing, to have to many opinions, so much information, coming at you from all directions all the time. How would you know who to trust?"

She shrugged. "But everyone can trust you."



"There are some who don't," he said. She looked surprised. "There are some who don't think it's a good idea to run a whole country like a business. That people should be allowed to say anything they want, do anything they like--"

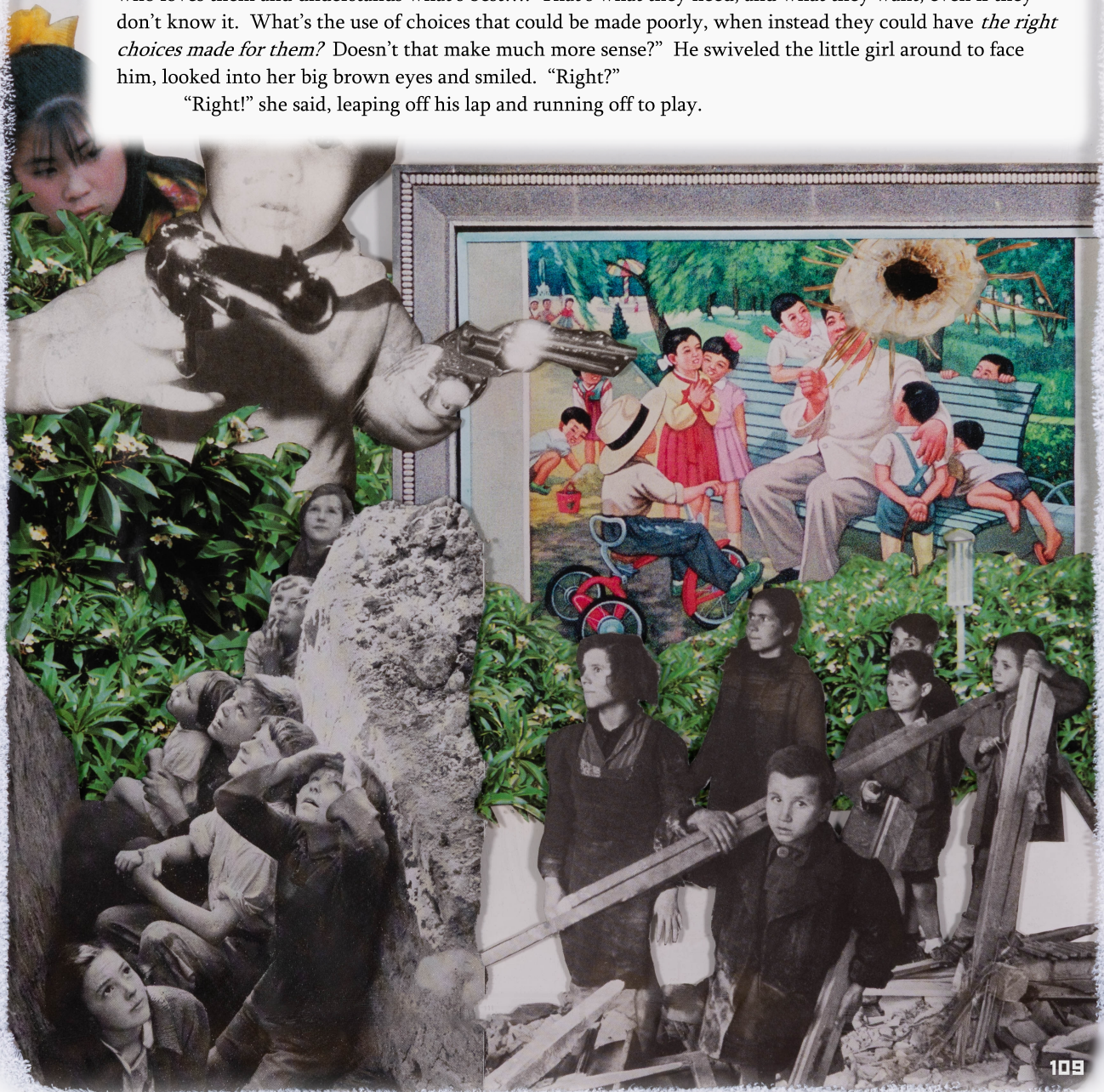
"Like litter?" she asked. And then, in a whisper, "...or kill people?"

"Or just live alone and not share what they have with their communities," he continued, his tone reassuring. "They don't want to be told what they should do, even if they know they should do it; they want to make Singapore just like everywhere else. They don't understand that we're different here, that we can show the whole world what the future could be if everyone agreed to make some compromises."

"What kinds of compromises?"

"Like admitting that most people don't know what they want, or the right way to get it, so letting them make big decisions that affect everyone around them isn't a good idea. Having a grampa like me, one who loves them and understands what's best.... That's what they need, and what they want, even if they don't know it. What's the use of choices that could be made poorly, when instead they could have *the right choices made for them*? Doesn't that make much more sense?" He swiveled the little girl around to face him, looked into her big brown eyes and smiled. "Right?"

"Right!" she said, leaping off his lap and running off to play.

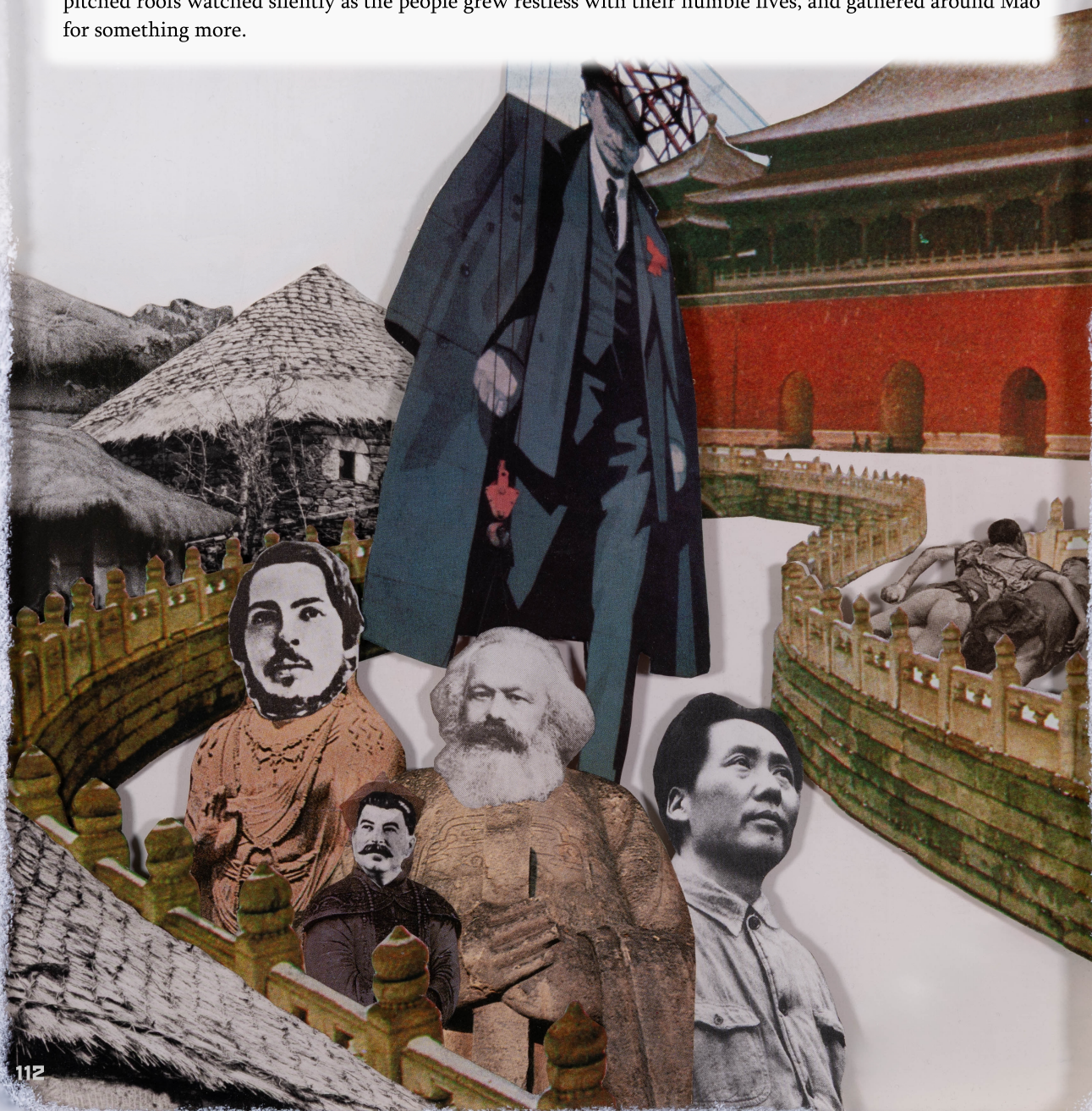


**CHAIRMAN MAO
ZEDONG**

**IN HIS
IMAGE**

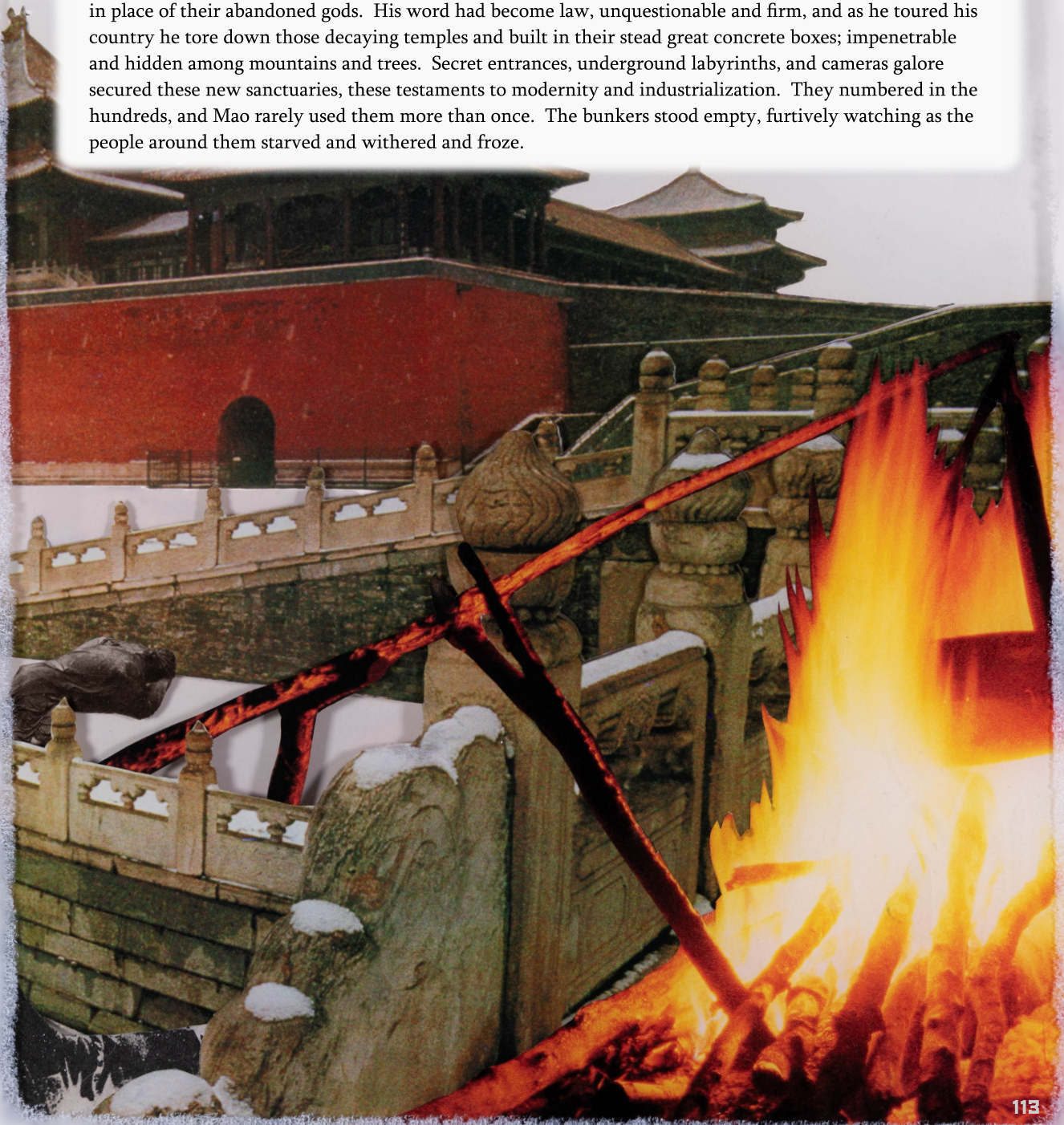
Long ago, before the Great Wall had begun, in earnest, to crumble, the land it protected was home to simple people who worked hard and lived in thatched roof huts they built themselves and lovingly tended year after year. The cottages clustered around scattered temples and churches of various faiths, each one all the more opulent for its humble surroundings. In one such village Mao Zedong was born, and from these modest beginnings he aspired to rule the world.

Mao was never one for religion, and so as he grew and collected to himself like-minded individuals he used the temples as meeting houses and places to build up his guerrilla resistance. Where once the teachings of Confucius echoed through the halls, now it was Marx and Engels and Lenin and Stalin; and these words began to trickle out into the villages. The temples, with their incense, wooden pillars, and pitched roofs watched silently as the people grew restless with their humble lives, and gathered around Mao for something more.



They watched, too, as Mao's influence spread, his words carrying ever more weight. They watched as they became strongholds for battles they didn't want fought, and prisons for the people who used to worship there. They watched as the people moved into the cities, abandoning their cottages to the elements in favor of factory jobs and government housing. Those that stayed did so only until they'd dismantled their homes, shoveling the pieces into backyard furnaces made to smelt metal for use in the wars. When the people eventually returned from the cities, their factories now shuttered and still, only the temples remained to greet them.

Mao had become the Chairman, the Great Leader of the people, whom they all loved and worshiped in place of their abandoned gods. His word had become law, unquestionable and firm, and as he toured his country he tore down those decaying temples and built in their stead great concrete boxes; impenetrable and hidden among mountains and trees. Secret entrances, underground labyrinths, and cameras galore secured these new sanctuaries, these testaments to modernity and industrialization. They numbered in the hundreds, and Mao rarely used them more than once. The bunkers stood empty, furtively watching as the people around them starved and withered and froze.



His power complete Mao began to remove the things in his country that he felt detracted from him. History, he thought, was of little use, and equally useless the monuments thereto. He tore them down not one by one but altogether, replacing some with himself and others with nothing at all. Schools became prisons, as had the churches, libraries and opera houses forgotten storage units. *Look only forward*, he urged the people, *and follow me*.

And follow they did, for years and years, their families and homes decaying around them, their statues long since melted down and their brickwork repurposed. And they spoke not a word against him, because even the walls have ears; though the room you sleep in today will shut its eyes to your torment tomorrow.

So they lived, and so he died, in a box made of concrete, surrounded by cameras and servants and secret exits through which Mao could no longer escape. His body became his prison, and decayed like the buildings he ruined. His eyes dimmed, forgotten windows to an empty room no longer full of power and might but only a miserable and helpless god, forced to watch as his empire crumbled around him.



SUGGESTED FURTHER READING:

Non-Fiction:

Blueprint for Revolution: How to Use Rice Pudding, Lego Men, and Other Nonviolent Techniques to Galvanize Communities, Overthrow Dictators, or Simply Change the World by Srdja Popovic
Dancing Bears: True Stories of People Nostalgic for Life Under Tyranny, and How to Feed a Dictator by Witold Szablowski
Surrender or Starve and *Balken Ghosts* by Robert D. Kaplan
A Backpack, A Bear, and Eight Crates of Vodka by Lev Golinkin
Koba the Dread by Martin Amis
Hammer & Tickle: The History of Communism Told Through Communist Jokes by Ben Lewis
Cambodian Witness by Someth May
Nothing to Envy by Barbara Demick
A Kim Jong-Il Production by Paul Fischer
An Ordinary Man by Paul Rusesabagina
We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families by Philip Gourevitch

Fiction:

Burmese Days by George Orwell
Darkness at Noon by Arthur Koestler
We by Yevgeny Zamyatin

